

Can't Have It Both Ways!

A/N If you are forced to participate in a competition that's reserved for adults only, doesn't that mean you should be considered an adult? Harry gets some much needed help and advice before having some fun by allowing his marauder heritage out to play. My attempt at a horcrux free forth year fic.

Disclaimer: since I write purely for fun and make no money off my work then I'm most definitely not JKR.

You may recognise the beginning of this story from the aforementioned JKR's 'Goblet of Fire', as usual with my stories, canon up until this point.

Chapter 1

"I'm not stupid you know."

"You're doing a really great impression of it," snapped Harry.

"Yeah?" said Ron, and there was no trace of a grin, forced or otherwise, on his face now. "You want to get to bed, Harry, I expect you'll need to be up early tomorrow for a photo call or something."

He wrenched the hangings shut around his four poster, leaving Harry standing there by the door, staring at the dark red velvet curtains, now hiding one of the few people who he thought would believe him.

Harry moved the Gryffindor banner off his bed and lay down, the noise from the party still going on downstairs destroying any chance of sleep. That seemed like a bad joke though as there was no way his mind was going to let him fall asleep for hours yet, the events of another disastrous Halloween that could be added to the Potter's growing collection were playing over and over in his head.

Hermione having to give him a push when his name came out that goblet, then every face in the hall staring at him, the one that stood out more than any other though was Cho. Harry had been slightly

crushing on her from afar but her expression tonight crushed all romantic thoughts towards the pretty Ravenclaw seeker.

Only his Aunt Petunia had ever looked at him like that before, when Dudley had pushed him down into old Ripper's leavings in the garden, yes Cho had looked at him as if he'd just been dipped in dog shit. Add to that a Veela who thought he was a 'little boy' and the Potter ego had taken a real battering tonight.

That wasn't even mentioning the fact that the whole school, including his supposed best friend, thought he was a cheating liar and were probably looking forward to watching him making an arse of himself. What really worried him was that this was an occurrence that was more than likely to happen as he hadn't a clue what he was doing.

It was kind of ironic that the only task he set himself this year was to try and find a girlfriend, the former number one candidate would now apparently rather date a dementor than go out with him.

If Harry was being honest with himself he would have to concede that Cho wasn't the number one candidate, a certain witch with beautiful chocolate brown eyes and that lovely hair had haunted his better dreams since the night they saved Sirius. Having her riding behind him on Buckbeak while holding on tight, let's just say he was now well aware that Hermione Jane Granger was all girl.

The problem was that they were a trio, her, him and Ron, though apparently that was no longer the case as Ron couldn't control his jealousy, Harry suspected he never would. On this horrible night Harry came to a decision, if Hermione believed him she would offer to help with his training, this would be his opportunity to ask her if she liked him enough to be his girlfriend, if she said no he could always hope the first task would kill him.

Harry realised that he had been lying there sorting out his thoughts for hours and that everyone else was not only in bed but fast asleep, he drew back his curtains to get his pyjamas when the unmistakable sound of an owl chapping at the window demanded his attention. Opening the window admitted a large, regal owl, wearing the crest of

Gringotts hanging from a fine silver chain, and carrying a scroll addressed to him.

Opening the scroll changed his life forever.

Dear Lord Potter

We here at Gringotts are distressed to discover that once again the life of our most prestigious customer is being unnecessarily placed at risk, we goblins consider this latest travesty as the last straw and feel duty bound to help you in any way we can. Our legal team have examined the magical contract and regret to announce it is unbreakable, this does not mean they haven't found a few loopholes that can be exploited, and as this would also be the equivalent of giving the finger to the ministry that would be considered payment enough for us.

You are being forced to compete in a ministry sponsored competition that is exclusively reserved for wizards and witches that are of age, our legal team insists that the ministry therefore must recognise you as an adult wizard. If the ministry fights this then you cannot be allowed to compete in the competition, they can't have it both ways!

Being declared an adult has major advantages, not least of which is full access to your inheritance and the freedom to choose where you live.

That certainly focused Harry's attention, he didn't know what to make of an inheritance but anything that could take him away from Privet Drive was all good in his book.

To claim your inheritance, and independence, simply press your thumb into the segregated square in the bottom left hand corner of the attached form, this will draw a drop of blood and signal your status as an adult wizard.

All at Gringotts eagerly await your decision on this matter but feel it is important to emphasise the choice is entirely yours to make, while we at Gringotts are pleased to offer advice, any final decision will always belong to our customer.

Barchoke

Head of the Potter Accounts

Potter accounts, just how many accounts did he have? Harry's eyes kept returning to 'freedom to choose where you live' which effectively meant no more Dursleys as, given the choice, he wouldn't go within fifty miles of them.

Since he was effectively being given that element of choice Harry didn't hesitate for a second, he pushed his thumb firmly into the square thus drawing the required blood. The parchment was surrounded by a blue energy before it completely disappeared, leaving Harry to wonder if he was dreaming or perhaps it hadn't work.

Another Gringotts owl chapping at the window held a scroll that answered his questions.

May we at Gringotts be the first to congratulate you Lord Potter on your becoming an adult in the magical world. I consider it imperative that we meet at the earliest opportunity therefore this note will act as a portkey to Gringotts bank, it is voice activated by the phrase "Lord Potter" but will only work outside the Hogwarts wards. We at Gringotts are looking forward to continuing our long and profitable partnership with the house of Potter.

Barchoke

Head of the Potter Accounts

Harry wanted to race out the front doors right this very minute but figured it would be easier to sneak out tomorrow. His mind was already forming a plan as he lay back on his bed and unbelievably fell asleep, dreaming of a life with no more Dursleys but definitely containing a beautiful brown eyed girl.

-oOoOo-

Laughing and a running hey, hey

Skiping and a jumping
In the misty morning fog with
Our hearts a thumpin' and you
My brown eyed girl,
You my brown eyed girl

(Van Morrison)

This was the soundtrack to Harry's most pleasant dream ever, he was almost sorry to wake up but he had to talk to the real Hermione, hoping his dream didn't turn into a nightmare. It was Sunday but he was up, showered and dressed before trying to sneak out the portrait hole without encountering any of his housemates. He was about to congratulate himself on escaping Gryffindor common room undetected when he almost collided with the one person he wanted to find, she was standing there like an angel with toast and pumpkin juice for him.

This simple gesture almost overwhelmed him, "Hermione I can't thank you enough, it's not just the toast but the fact that you're here for me."

She smiled sweetly, "Don't worry Harry, I figured you wouldn't want to go anywhere near the great hall this morning."

Harry made sure his mouth was empty of toast before replying, "That bad huh?"

"The Hufflepuffs think you stole their thunder, Cho is Cedric's girlfriend and turned Ravenclaw against you while the Slytherins would rather see anyone win but Harry Potter. All of Gryffindor is fully behind you though, well nearly all."

"Yeah but every one of them thinks I cheated my way into the competition, especially Ron"

"Harry, one look at your face last night and I knew you didn't put your name in that goblet, and anyway you know you can't keep secrets from me Potter. I've already started work on a training schedule, researching what spells could be useful..."

Harry banished what was left of his juice, leaving his hands free so he could throw his arms around Hermione, this had the effect of silencing the young witch. Harry leaned in slowly for a kiss, giving Hermione plenty of time to object but found her leaning in as well while her arms reached up to his shoulders to ensure he wasn't going anywhere.

Their first kiss was gentle, loving and held the promise of many more to come, they finished with their foreheads resting against one another as Harry fought to get himself under control before speaking, "Knowing me I've probably made a mess of things by not asking you before that kiss but Hermione, would you be my girlfriend?"

Hermione kissed him again before answering, "Harry James Potter, if you think I would let anyone but my boyfriend kiss me like that then you don't know me very well."

Harry lifted Hermione off her feet and spun her around as she giggled, he kissed her once more before dragging his new girlfriend away from the Gryffindor entrance, "Hermione we have to talk but not here," Harry's whole face lit up with joy as an idea came to him, Hermione thought that if this was a cartoon, a light bulb bright enough to illuminate the entire castle would be beside Harry's head.

"Oh that is perfect, I probably won't understand half of what they say anyway. You will come with me, please!"

Hermione felt her heart melt at the needy expression on his face, she'd had a boyfriend less than two minutes yet that look could totally undermine all her defences. She just couldn't say no to him and only the fact that this was Harry saved that from being a terrifying thought, he would never do anything to hurt her.

A hug and kiss later found her once again being dragged along but this time she had worked out their destination, she would be a good girlfriend and give him a chance to explain before biting his head off.

They arrived at the statue of the one eyed witch where Harry took his father's map out, checking that the coast was clear.

“Harry, could you please tell me what’s going on?” Hermione asked sweetly.

Had Harry been a bit more experienced with girls or even paying full attention to his girlfriend he may have recognised the danger signals in those words, as it was only pure luck deflected their first argument as a couple.

“Hermione I promise you’ll know everything I do, just not here. Trust me love it’s quite a story.”

Promising full disclosure, peaking her interest with ‘quite a story’ and calling Hermione ‘love’ had placated his girlfriend for now, she consoled her rule breaking concerns with the fact that they wouldn’t technically have left the school grounds, just standing in a tunnel that led directly to Hogsmead.

“Dissendium” led to the opening appearing as Harry helped her escape the castle, she was soon joined by her boyfriend as they lit their wands. There was no ambiguity in Hermione’s next statement, even someone as thick as Ron couldn’t have missed the obvious danger signals, “Ok Harry, so far I’ve been a good little girlfriend and we can’t be overheard down here. Spill it Potter, now!”

Harry pulled her close as he tried to figure out the best way to tell Hermione just what was going on, the only thing that came to mind was to give it to her straight, “Hermione, all the adults in that room last night agreed I was being set-up for something, they all had opinions but nobody gave a shit about mine!”

Once Harry started the floodgates opened, “Whoever entered me for the tri-wiz did not do so for the sake of my health, quite the opposite in fact, yet the people who are supposedly charge with my safety and welfare seem quite happy to have me staked out there like a sacrificial lamb. Their only interest seems to be who would take the bait, not what could happen to me, I felt like a worm on a fisherman’s hook, about to be cast into the water to see what fancies a nibble.”

Hermione was holding him tight as she tried to reassure him, "Listen Harry, anybody attempting to nibble on you who is not named Hermione Granger is going to have to deal with your seriously angry girlfriend first."

The thought of Hermione nibbling on him couldn't fail to raise a smile, he knew that was why his girlfriend had said it. "Last night I received an offer of help that I willingly accepted and we're on our way there now. What would you say if I told you your boyfriend was of age, not only that but apparently a lord to boot."

Hermione was nonplussed so Harry helped her out, "The goblins contacted me with an interesting legal point, since I'm being forced to compete in a competition the rules clearly state only of age wizards or witches may enter into then I must be considered an adult. Either that or I should be disqualified for being under-age, the ministry can't have it both ways and the goblins will help me make sure that they don't. I have a portkey to take me to Gringotts and want you to come with me, we need to get outside Hogwarts wards before it will work though."

Hermione had been worried sick ever since his name came out of that goblet, her relief that someone was actually helping her Harry far outweighed any concerns she had about breaking rules by leaving the school grounds. She grabbed his hand and began dragging him along the tunnel, "We had better get a move on then."

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Barchoke felt the wards trigger indicating Lord Potter's portkey had been activated, the appearance of two teens in his office confirmed this, "Good morning Lord Potter, my name is Barchoke and it's a pleasure to meet you, though I wasn't expecting you to bring company."

"Barchoke, this is my best friend and girlfriend, Hermione Granger. Anything you have to say to me can be said in front of her, she's stood by me through everything and I trust her with my life."

"Good morning Miss Granger, I meant no disrespect and will happily comply with Lord Potter's wishes. I have taken the liberty of

requesting some refreshments as I fear we may be here for quite some time. I suggest we deal with the Potter estate first, sorting out the legal requirements before moving on to more recent matters.”

It was well over an hour later when two badly shaken Gryffindors were drinking cups of tea, trying to come to grips with the fact that Harry was exceedingly wealthy and had his choice of homes rather than the Dursleys. Hermione was trying to work out why Harry had been dumped there in the first place while the boy in question was rubbing the back of his hand, there were a stack of documents that had required his signature in blood. She was so pleased he'd asked her to be his girlfriend before she had found out about all the gold, it was easy to say it didn't matter but with that sum involved who would believe her.

Barchoke then wanted to hear about their adventures at Hogwarts, when Harry told the tale of the chamber of secrets, the goblin's eyes widened to almost Dobby proportions but he didn't interrupt, just adding to his now copious notes. His quill sped up with the happenings in the shrieking shack and only stopped after Harry related the manipulations after his name was spat out the goblet.

They then had a lovely lunch in Barchoke's rather plush office to give the goblin time to digest the mountain of information he'd just been given. “Lord Potter, what you have told me here this morning not only confirms suspicions the goblin nation had but fills in a few gaps as well. Your actions since attending Hogwarts have major ramifications that should have been explained to you, it could change your status dramatically which I believe is why this information was deliberately withheld.”

Harry and Hermione hadn't a clue what Barchoke was alluding to so he attempted to explain it, “You have now defeated the heir of Slytherin three times in deadly combat, the last confrontation was in Salazar's own chamber and you battled his Basilisk at the same time. I believe you could now claim to be the heir of Slytherin by right of conquest, the sword of Gryffindor coming to your aid would give you a strong case for being heir of that house as well.”

Hermione could clearly see the utter panic in Harry's eyes, she took his hand and felt the Potter head of house ring, this appeared to bring her boyfriend's mind into focus as he reached a decision, "Barchoke, in the last twenty four hours I've been entered into a competition where people have died, become head of house Potter and a wonderful girl agreed to be my girlfriend. I have no idea what being heir to Slytherin or Gryffindor means but, since I'm only fourteen I think I have quite enough to be going on with at the moment. We can always come back to it at a later date."

Hermione wanted to grab him to snog his brains out, she'd never been so proud of him. The only thing stopping her was the certainty that it would breach goblin etiquette and they still needed their help, "Barchoke, you mentioned helping Harry with the competition, how can you help him?"

The goblin was momentarily stunned, he'd never met a wizard who'd refused power before, Barchoke needed to see how far this couple wanted to go. "Lord Potter, can I ask what your goals are for the competition?"

There was no hesitation from Harry, "Be alive at the end of it and hopefully not have made too big an arse of myself in the process."

A grinning goblin was a fearsome sight, "We goblins are a warrior race, banned by magic users from even having an army, so we have had to develop more subtle ways of winning the battles. Our American cousins have a saying that's rather appropriate, they call it sticking it to the human!"

Both teenagers tried not to laugh at the adaptation of a phrase they were familiar with.

"We now take great delight in spoiling a witch or wizard's day, not grovelling at their feet and being deliberately pedantic in our dealings with them can put a pureblood off their lunch. We have here a golden opportunity to turn this very high profile, ministry organised competition into a farce, your late father would have called it a prank."

The two teens glanced at one another and nodded, Harry didn't want to be entered in the first place so why shouldn't he take the piss out of the people who were forcing him to compete while Hermione just wanted him safe.

"What did you have in mind?" Harry asked

That goblin grin was back in full force, "All the financial arrangements are done through Gringotts, we even made and charmed the golden articles you have to retrieve in the first task. I really see only one problem"

Both teens waited for an answer but Barchoke was looking unusually pensive, "In the second task something you prize will be taken from you and placed at the bottom of the lake, you will have one hour to rescue it. I have only known you for a short time yet it is blindingly obvious what they will take."

Hermione was still trying to figure it out when she felt Harry stiffen beside her, his voice suddenly held a quality of menace she'd never heard before. "Anyone trying to lay a hand on my Hermione will find me waiting for them, I might just need Gryffindor's sword after all."

"Won't I be able to just say no?" Hermione asked, not relishing the thought of being under the lake at all.

"Was Harry given a choice? There is a way around this but I think I'll make the suggestion then leave you two alone to talk about it. Anyone attempting to place Lord Potter's betrothed at the bottom of the lake would find themselves at minimum facing five years in Azkaban."

The two teens were so intent on each other that Barchoke left the room unnoticed, Harry felt he had to say something, "Hermione you know I would do anything to keep you safe and the thought of you as my betrothed fills me with the most pleasant feeling I've ever known. I realise that this is very quick and not the most romantic of settings but would you at least consider the idea?"

Hermione's heart was racing but she tried to be practical, "Harry what are your plans, your dreams, what do you want to do with your life?"

Harry knew this was a moment for total honesty, if he truly wanted this girl to be his betrothed then he had to do something he'd never done in his life before, lay bare his soul. "Hermione my plans always seem to consist of surviving my current year at Hogwarts and then being shipped off back to my loving relatives for a summer of fun and laughter. My dreams recently have featured my brown eyed girl and any future dreams are hopefully going to continue that trend. What I want to do with my life is survive Hogwarts, never go back to the Dursleys and have you part of it always in whatever form you'll have me. My ultimate aim in life is to have a family of my own and be the best dad and husband possible, I've only ever dreamed this a few times but in every one it was always you that was by my side."

Hermione's sensible/practical side had crashed and burned when he called her his brown eyed girl, those brown eyes currently had tears in them as she answered, "Harry that would be a dream come true for me as well, I would love to be your betrothed."

Outside there may be a dark lord, death eaters and any number of others who wanted him dead but at the moment he didn't care, he was happier than he'd ever been so why shouldn't he be allowed to enjoy it. "I think I need to buy my betrothed a ring."

Harry was positive there must be some kind of monitoring charm on the room because Barchoke re-entered with a case full of Potter family rings.

"There was never any doubt Lord Potter would ask and I was just as sure your young lady would say yes, we have here an assortment of Potter betrothal rings, some dating back centuries."

Hermione found herself drawn to one that was platinum with an emerald the exact shade of Harry's eyes, the Potter crest gave the illusion of floating inside the gemstone, it really was a thing of beauty.

Harry placed it on her finger and it shrank to fit as if especially made for her by a master of their craft. If Barchoke hadn't interrupted they

may have stood there, holding hands and gazing into each others eyes all day.

“Lord Potter, I took the liberty of having the Gryffindor and Slytherin rings brought up from the founder’s vault and beg you to reconsider your decision. Being a founder’s heir would allow you and your betrothed to portkey to and from Hogwarts, the castle itself would protect you from attack within its walls. There are books detailing much more of what a founder’s heir can do but for the safety and protection alone I advise you to try the rings on.”

If trying on a ring could keep Hermione safe then Harry was going to do it, the Gryffindor ring resized on first contact while the snake motif on the Slytherin ring actually spoke to him in parseltongue, Harry’s answer in the same language was enough for it to decide he was the rightful heir.

The grin on Barchoke’s face had turned predatory, “Now we need to plan how you want to handle this, we don’t want to give away any secrets too soon.”

Hermione was adamant though, “I’m not covering up my ring, I don’t care who knows that Harry and I are betrothed.”

Barchoke nodded in understanding, “I think our first goal should be gaining some control over the media, then...” they talked for hours.

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They were in an empty corridor as Harry searched the map for a certain individual, Hermione was still in awe at her new book bag and the gifts it contained. There was everything from books that belonged to the founders to the original rule book for the tri-wizard cup yet it weighed less than a kilo. The ministry had only changed the age requirement so everything else was still valid but she was fairly certain this was the only copy in the castle.

“Found her, she’s in the library sitting alone, if we hurry we can still make dinner in time before the show begins.”

They hurried towards the library and Hermione couldn't believe how much she was looking forward to tonight, pranks had always made her blood boil as she thought of it as a form of bullying but not here. This was the little guy striking back at authority, unjust authority at that, in one day she'd went from know-it-all bookworm to Hermione Jane Granger, betrothed of Lord Harry Potter and freedom fighter, she really needed to cut down on the romantic novels.

Luna Lovegood heard her name called and cringed, she'd been having a lovely day as everyone was too busy discussing the happenings of Halloween to bother with her, looks like that was about to change. She turned her head around to see who had spoke to her and got one of the biggest shocks of her life.

"You're Luna Lovegood? I'm Harry Potter and this is Hermione Granger, do you mind if we join you for a moment."

Luna could only move her head to signal it was ok, her vocal chords had frozen at the thought that Harry Potter knew her name.

"Luna we understand your father owns the Quibbler, we would like to do a deal giving him exclusive rights to 'Harry Potter'..."

Luna was on her feet, "I thought you would be different Harry but you're just like all the rest, making fun of me." She went to run away but suddenly found herself staring into the greenest eyes she'd ever seen, boy he moved fast!

"Luna enough people have made fun of me in my life to ensure I would never do it to anyone else, please sit with us and we can talk about this."

She felt Harry's hand on her arm as he gently led her back to her seat, "That was a serious offer? Harry our paper is a very small, family run business, we couldn't afford that."

"I'm selling the rights up until the first of July next year for one Galleon, do you think your father would be interested?"

Luna was suddenly all business, "I'm on the board of directors and my father always says I can do any deals, up to the value of one galleon, so on behalf of the Quibbler I would be delighted to accept."

Harry withdrew a contract that Barchoke had drawn up for him, "Luna this deal is with your family and the Quibbler, if your father tries to sell the rights or the newspaper the contract will be broken."

Luna understood and tried to set Harry's mind at rest, "My dad loves that newspaper, he could no more sell it than he could me, we may be purebloods but we don't stick to the old ways."

"This deal means that anyone else printing pictures or stories featuring myself or my betrothed will receive a visit from our lawyers."

Luna's head spun round to see the lovely girl playing with her beautiful new ring, "Congratulations to both of you, are we allowed to print that? Oh I don't have a galleon on me."

Hermione handed her a galleon to give to Harry, "Luna you can print what you want as long as it's the truth, since Harry and I are betrothed, and I have no intention of hiding that fact then of course you may print it."

The contract accepted Luna's signature, glowing golden before duplicating a copy for each party then disappearing.

Everyone was happy with the deal because they all benefited from it, "Luna would you care to join s for dinner? Everyone seems determined to talk about Harry so in about twenty minutes we're going to give them something to talk about, as our newly appointed press representative I wouldn't want you to miss it."

Luna was walking along the corridor towards the great hall beside the couple who were holding hands thinking she wouldn't miss this for the world.

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Ron Weasley was in a right funk, what was the point of blatantly ignoring someone if they weren't around for you to blatantly ignore, to make matters worse Hermione had been missing all day as well. She was far too sensible though to fall for that tri-wiz champion fame rubbish though, forgetting that had he been able to enter he would have used the status to get with as many girls as possible.

The silence that descended over the hall drew his attention to the couple that had just entered, the couple who were holding hands, the couple containing the girl he wanted and that back-stabbing bastard Potter. Ron was on his feet with his wand firing a curse while he tried to scream abuse at his former friends, the sudden pain was unbelievable as he glanced down at the chunk of hamburger that used to be his hand, Ron was screaming now for an entirely different reason.

Hermione had watched as the curse sped towards them but, before they could even think of reacting, Ron's wand exploded in his hand. Barchoke was certainly right about the castle offering protection, "I'm so glad you took those rings Harry."

"Not as glad as I am that you took mine," he kissed her forehead in relief before multiple shouts of "POTTER!" emanated from the staff table. This is bloody typical thought Harry, for the first time ever we actually have a plan and barely make it through the door before said plan goes out the window; they were just going to have to wing it as usual.

A/N I know I said I'd never do two stories at the same time again but I was left with little option, this is the story I had intended to write after Fate's Gambit. After starting FG2 this just kept intruding into my thoughts leaving writing it as my only choice, I can only write what's in my head so will continue with my weekly update schedule, just no promises which story it will be. As always, thanks for reading.

Can't Have It Both Ways

Author's Ramblings: I wrote a fair piece of this chapter on the train from King's Cross, London travelling back up to Scotland today. While in the station I made my usual pilgrimage over to the wall that marks Platform Nine and three quarters only to find it gone as part of the station's refurbishment. It used to be eye opening to watch the queue of people from both sexes, all ages and multiple nationalities as they waited to get their photo's taken at the famous sign, it was always a small reminder of just how many people Jo Rowling has reached with Harry Potter. I hope the station will retain something for the fans to visit though I suppose a Victorian brick wall would look out of place inside a twenty-first century building.

Chapter 2

The three stood there and watched as Madam Pomfrey headed straight for Ron, McGonagall seemed to deliberate before deciding Poppy could handle the situation and moved in their direction while Dumbledore and Snape could hardly wait to get to them. The sight of these three heading in her direction had Luna actually shaking but she was determined to stand by the two Gryffindors, she was also unaccustomed to being the centre of attention and was sure her housemates would make her pay for it later.

"Potter, what did you do?" sneered Snape.

Harry kept his face straight, "I'm sorry sir but I have no idea what you're talking about."

"Don't lie to me Potter, what did you do to Weasley's hand?"

"I didn't do anything to him, all our wands are still in our pockets. I really would appreciate you having some proof before you accuse me of lying, sir." Harry looked around the hall and raised his voice slightly, "And that goes for everyone."

Snape's sneer was running full force now, "You're not still trying to maintain that ridiculous 'I didn't enter' story, just be a man and admit it."

Harry removed his wand and pointed it straight up, "I, Harry James Potter swear on my life and magic that I did not enter myself in the tri-wizard tournament." The light that surrounded him illuminated the entire great hall, as the light faded Harry cast his patronus and the silver stag sprang forward looking for enemies, on finding none prongs faded slowly out of existence but not before leaving quite a few people reevaluating their opinions.

"It would appear sir that you owe me an apology, will you be a man and give it?"

Snape just stared straight into Harry's eyes and then those closest to the group clearly heard the hissing coming from the hidden ring, "Mr Potter, what is that?" asked McGonagall.

"That Professor is a gift from a friend of mine that's telling me Snape is attempting to enter my mind, and that I can legally kill him where he stands for that transgression."

"And what do you think of that Harry?" Dumbledore asked.

Hermione spotted the verbal trap and answered before Harry could say anything, "Actually we're more interested in what you think headmaster, since a member of your staff carried out an illegal attack on a student in the middle of the great hall."

Dumbledore's eye's twinkled, "To quote Mr Potter, where is your proof Miss Granger?"

Hermione was done bowing to authority figures, especially ones that were out to harm her Harry, "Well following Harry's example of honesty, I'm quite sure Professor Snape wouldn't object to swearing an oath that he didn't just try to invade Harry's mind, that would easily clear up this whole misunderstanding."

If looks could kill Hermione would be dead as Snape stared daggers at her, the confrontation was disturbed by the arrival of Gringotts owls, the sight of owls at dinner was a rarity but since they were easily recognisable as belonging to the wizarding bank then everyone paid attention.

One headed to the Hufflepuff table and delivered its message to Justin Finch-Fletchley, a pair landed at the Gryffindor table beside Ginny and Colin.

“Potter, what is this?” asked Justin.

“Compensation Justin.”

Ginny’s voice was quivering, “Harry, this is a cheque for fifty thousand galleons. Why are you doing this?”

“ This payment is for the people who were attacked by the Basilisk...”

“Where’s my owl then Potter?” shouted Ron who was still being worked on by Pomfrey.

“ The only thing that attacked you was Lockhart, if you want compensation I suggest you speak to the person that hired the imposter.”

Another owl entering drew everyone’s attention as they now knew these birds carried a fortune, it headed straight for Hermione though. “Harry you didn’t have to...” as she put her arm up for the owl to land on, shrill screams came from the Gryffindor table that gave Hermione barely enough time to collect the message before the owl shot up to the rafters and safety. Snape found himself shoved to the side as both Hermione’s dorm mates spotted her ring and rushed towards her.

“Oh Hermione it’s gorgeous...”

“You and Harry...”

“We always knew you two would get together...”

“You have to tell us everything!”

“GIRLS!” McGonagall was in her Scottish Terrier mode, why her animagus form was a pussy cat was an unsolvable mystery, “Mr Potter if I don’t get an explanation soon I’m going to get angry, you wouldn’t like me when I’m angry!”

“ Professor McGonagall, tonight I’m going down into Salazar Slytherin’s secret chamber to collect the body of a sixty foot Basilisk that I killed with a sword, no offence ma’am but scary as you are, you can’t kill me with a single look.”

Snape exploded, “You insufferable little brat, there will be nothing removed from Hogwarts, it will be rendered into potion ingredients after you open the chamber.”

“There may be a slight problem with that sir as I’ve already sold the carcass, that’s why I shared the money with its victims, nobody else seemed to give a Knut for them losing months of their lives.”

Dumbledore was growing concerned, Harry should be full of nerves, worry and doubt, not standing here confidently facing down Minerva and Severus. His usual tactics of unleashing his two attack dogs while he stood and observed, ready to step in and play his benevolent mediator role, was not going to work here. Whatever had changed with Potter needed to be reversed, and quickly, “Perhaps you could explain who you sold the basilisk to Mr Potter?”

Barchoke proved he had impeccable timing by choosing that exact moment to enter the great hall, as he was accompanied by a dozen goblins with long, razor sharp blades that could cut through a basilisk’s hide, they provided quite a show and froze everyone into position. “Our apologies Lord Potter but it took slightly longer to put together your accommodation module than we anticipated, in our defence I would like to say that we built in a few additional extras”

“Thank you Barchoke, my betrothed and I will check it out after our business is finished in the chamber,” Harry turned to Luna, “As a tri-wizard champion I’m apparently allowed an entourage, would you like to be my press representative? It would mean moving out of the Ravenclaw dorm and moving in with us.”

Luna spared one glance at her housemates before answering, “Hell yes!”

“ Nobody will be moving anywhere!” Dumbledore pronounced, arrogantly passing judgement over everything as if the matter was now closed.

This was Barchoke’s moment, the goblin’s payment, an opportunity to stick it to Dumbledore. “I’m afraid that’s not your decision to make headmaster, by forcing Lord Potter to compete in this competition you unintentionally made him a legal adult. You could have cancelled the competition and redrawn the names anytime in the first four hours, you chose instead to tell a fourteen-year-old wizard he must compete then sent him off to bed with a patronising pat on the head.”

McGonagall had just got angry and turned on Albus, “You knew this and still let the lad compete? What the hell were you thinking?”

Barchoke continued, “A supposition was made that Lord Potter’s name had been scurrilously entered under the pseudonym of a fictitious fourth school, this must have indeed been the case as the rules clearly state that each school is allowed only one champion, Cedric Diggory is without question the Hogwarts champion.” This really perked up the Hufflepuff contingent in the hall.

“Lord Potter has graciously accepted our offer to represent the Goblin Academy of Youth, we of course realise that GAY has different connotations in your culture so it will just say Gringotts on the front of his robes.”

Having Harry appear in robes that proclaimed Gringotts on the front and Potter on the back would do more for goblin/wizarding relations than any other act this last century, there was no Goblin Academy but

the expression on Dumbledore's face at the thought of 'his' golden boy parading around proclaiming GAY on his shirt was worth the lie and prevent him objecting to Gringotts. Anything that took the piss out of the chief warlock was manna from heaven to the goblins. The misconception that the goblins hated wizards in general was one the purebloods were happy to cultivate, what the goblins hated was being treated like second class citizens and the fact they'd had to fight a couple of wars to get even that. Treating a goblin with respect would see that respect returned, along with greatly improved service, it was such a shame most wizards never bothered to find this out.

Barchoke was really enjoying himself now, "As he's now considered an outsider competing in the tri-wizard, Lord Potter is entitled to the same conditions as the other two champions, both are living and training in separate dwellings on Hogwarts grounds, we have taken the liberty of supplying something similar for our champion and his entourage."

Dumbledore was now sweating buckets, Harry had his inheritance, was legally an adult and now a goblin champion, how the hell was he supposed to get him to go back to the Dursleys this summer. This wasn't a set back but a bloody disaster, all those carefully laid out scenarios just got flushed away. He would just have to do this a bit at a time, Albus didn't know his night was only going to get worse.

Barchoke turned to Harry, "Whenever you're ready Lord Potter."

Harry glanced over at the Gryffindor table, "Colin I assume you've got your camera with you, how would you like to get a picture of the monster that put you in the infirmary?" Colin literally jumped at the chance, he actually was jumping up and down on the spot with excitement. Harry's eyes sought out Ginny's, the poor girl was white as a sheet but with a determined set to her jaw, "Ginny?"

"Yes Harry, its time to put it behind me, I need to do this."

Justin had his answer all ready for when Harry looked in his direction, "Oh yes please Potter, this is a once in a lifetime opportunity, thanks for including me."

They headed out the great hall in the direction of Myrtle's bathroom only to find that what appeared to be the whole school was following on behind. "Em, Harry we may just have a problem here," Hermione whispered.

"Don't worry love, me and Sal got it covered, keep an eye on Ginny though since she's the only other person who knows what's waiting on us down there. She's really terrified and needs her friends to stick close."

Luna had spent her time at Hogwarts listening and watching, never participating because Loony wasn't wanted. She listened as Harry told Hermione that Ginny would need her, watched as she gave his hand a squeeze before moving across to the girl and Luna knew it was time to participate, this couple actually wanted her, Loony Lovegood. She moved over to be with Hermione and offer support to Ginny, the two smiles she received actually made her feel what it was to be wanted for the first time in years.

They reached the toilet with the goblins acting as a buffer between Harry's invited guests and the rest of the school, Ginny was now visibly shaking with both Hermione and Luna having their arms around the girl.

"Ginny you know I'll never let anything happen to you, don't you?"

She managed a weak smile, "Yes Harry I always feel safe when you're around, congratulations on your betrothal to Hermione, I'm really happy for you both but sorry about my prat of a brother."

Everyone watched in amazement as Harry opened the sink, the Slytherin ring hissed in parseltongue which saw the chute become spotlessly clean, stairs appear along its length and Harry certainly felt the wards that went up. He led them down but the real fun started after the goblins followed them, Albus attempted to enter the chute but found his way blocked by an invisible barrier, a barrier so strong it supported his weight as if standing on a thick sheet of glass. That he couldn't even detect it, far less dispel it frightened him more than anything else he'd see or heard tonight.

Unsurprisingly the barrier also blocked Severus, perhaps less of a surprise was his reaction to this, "Potter, if you don't get back up here and remove this barrier now then you will have detention with me every day for the next three years." There was absolutely no surprise in the fact that Harry totally ignored Snape's ranting.

The real surprise was when Minerva pushed past the head of Slytherin and found no barrier in her way, quick as a flash Albus took her arm, hoping that this would gain him entry as well, being flung onto his arse on the other side of the toilet confirmed this method would not work either. Snape's anger was escalating exponentially as he watched the other two heads of house allowed entry as well but when the Weasley twins were granted access, the greasy haired one reached for his wand.

As luck would have it Albus was quicker and grabbed his arm, "Severus we have still not ascertained what happened to Mr Weasley's hand when he fired that curse, I have yet to meet a one handed potion master so perhaps you should desist from this course of action for the moment. Let us learn from whom the barrier lets through and wait on the party returning, we can then make our claim that Hogwarts should receive at least part of the basilisk without having the unpleasant task of having to harvest the decaying carcass."

Snape had to smile at the old man's guile and control, the headmaster being barred from a part of Hogwarts must really hurt his pride yet he appeared serene, almost as if he planned to be spending Sunday night hanging about in a girls toilet, while the Slytherin struggled to work out what was wrong with that last statement, Albus never took his eyes off who was being admitted/rejected.

All the Gryffindor forth year, sans Ronald Weasley who was in the infirmary and the Quidditch team were allowed, as was Hufflepuff's Susan Bones and Hannah Abbot. Cedric Diggory was a surprise more for the way his girlfriend was ejected, a la Dumbledore, Miss Chang appeared to be more upset that Mr Diggory chose to go on without her as teenage tears fell. Apart from Miss Lovegood not one Ravenclaw student was granted access but the real surprise was

when Miss Davis and Miss Greengrass were allowed to proceed down the stairs, the look of shock on their faces was mirrored by everyone left standing in the toilet, trying to tune out Myrtle's moaning.

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They were all gathered in a group waiting as the goblins removed the cave-in, "This is where Lockhart tried to obliviate us, we went to him because he was the defence professor and the coward was going to leave us all here to die while he played the tragic hero, the git already planning to write it up as his new bestseller."

As the group digested that information Little Professor Flitwick just had to ask, "Mr Potter, what was that ward upstairs and why did it let some people through but not others?"

"This is a founder's chamber that apparently recognises me from before, it's only allowed those through that it found worthy."

Flitwick appeared concerned with that analysis, "That worries me Mr Potter when we have more Slytherins down here than Ravenclaws."

"I have no problem with Slytherin house sir, the sorting hat wanted to put me there but I refused to be in the same house as Draco." Harry pointedly looked towards Luna, "I also hate bullies which may explain the absence of your house professor."

Images of the young girl with the strange earrings sitting alone at dinner, in the library and charms class came to mind, he'd just never connected the dots before, Filius had now got the message loud and clear, "Rest assured I shall investigate."

Tracy had only stepped forward with Daphne for a laugh, no one was more shocked than her that they were allowed through, yet here she was and now even more shocked, "The sorting hat really wanted to put you in Slytherin?"

Harry smiled and nodded, "When I got on that train I knew practically nothing of magic, never mind houses, I didn't ask for Gryffindor, just

not the same house that Malfoy was in, after meeting the arse I didn't want to be classed the same as him."

The goblins had cleared a passage so they moved along to the large door with snakes on it, "This may smell a bit since it's been lying here for two years." Harry hissed to open the door and discovered it smelt more than a bit, the three heads of house had their wands out casting air freshening spells as they entered the chamber proper, torches lit around the walls and the basilisk was revealed, stopping everyone in their tracks.

Hermione desperately wanted to go and throw her arms around Harry but currently she and Luna were the only things holding Ginny up. Harry led the three girls over to where he'd found Ginny and she sunk to her knees and sobbed, Hermione and Luna were trying to console her as Harry found himself suddenly grabbed by two seriously crying, emotional wrecks of Weasley twins.

"I'm looking at it and still don't bloody believe it!"

"You fought that to save our Ginny?"

"Anything we have is yours."

"You ever need us, we're there."

"You're more of a Weasley brother than that prat upstairs is."

Both then pulled him into a hug that would rival their mother's before wiping their eyes and going to help their sister. This freed Hermione to fly into his arms, "I know you told me it was big but that's not big, it's bloody gigantic! How the hell did you kill that with a sword?"

Harry held her face gently in his hands, "You should know nothing touches my Hermione and gets away with it." He kissed her tenderly on the lips and even McGonagall had tears in her eyes.

Justin and Colin were staring at the monster in disbelief, it was only now beginning to sink in how close they had come to death, neither

had any illusions that they would be able to take that thing on with a machine gun, far less a sword. Colin was so shocked he'd yet to take a picture.

Cedric Diggory thought they should take the tri-wiz trophy and just hand it to Harry right now, this beast was roaming the corridors of the school and all the ministry had done was arrest Hagrid. What made him even angrier is that instead of rewarding Harry and looking after the students who were petrified, the whole thing had been swept under the rug as usual. The rumour mill had Harry defeating you-know-who again in his first year and all he received for his efforts was house points and another cover up, looking at this beast Cedric doubted if the combined efforts of himself and the other two champions could have survived the encounter, never mind defeat the huge basilisk. He had thought Harry's patronus in the great hall was an impressive piece of magic but this! Cedric had a feeling that a certain French veela would be left to eat her 'little boy' comment before too long.

Barchoke approached Harry and Hermione with awe in his voice, "Lord Potter, I fear we have seriously underestimated the value of this beast, never before has one this size been discovered, Gringotts would be more than willing to renegotiate your payment."

"Barchoke, we made the deal in good faith and I'm happy with it. If you feel bad about it then donate some new brooms to Hogwarts, Luna here will make sure you get good publicity for it."

The goblin was afraid Lord Potter would think they had deceived him on price and, while a goblin loved making profit, there had to be honour involved. Here was a way for great profit, with trust and honour satisfied on both sides, and good publicity for the goblin nation thrown in, working with Lord Potter was going to be different.

Ginny had got herself under control and approached as Barchoke spoke to Harry, Hermione and Luna, she was carrying a certain fang "Harry can I have this as a keepsake?" the funny looks she was getting from both girls and the goblin forced her to explain, "Harry pulled this out his arm and stabbed the diary with it, saving my life.

He was dying and trying to apologise for not being quick enough before Fawkes cried into his wound.”

Hermione just held him tighter, “Typical Harry Potter, thinks of everyone else before himself.”

An embarrassed Harry replied, “If it makes you feel better Ginny then by all means take it, I would like you to give it to Barchoke first though so we can be certain all the venom has been removed.”

Drawing on reserves of courage she didn’t know she possessed, Ginny kissed Harry on the cheek, “I can never thank you enough Harry, all I can do is try to be the best friend I can be.”

The flash that illuminated the chamber signified Colin had overcome his initial shock and was now happily snapping away, it took the goblin team the best part of an hour to decide on the most efficient method to harvest this mountain of gold, the minute they started cutting into the basilisk, the exodus back upstairs hurriedly began.

Soon only Harry, Hermione and Luna were left, though as Professor Sprout walked passed them she couldn’t resist a comment, “You know of course that the headmaster and professor Snape will be waiting for you leaving here?”

The smile on Hermione’s face could only be described as wicked, “You might want to send them some cocoa later, they’re both in for a long night with only Myrtle for company.”

All three students were certain they saw a smirk on the head of Hufflepuff’s face.

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Colin had a smile on his face that was wider than the Grand Canyon as he exited into the bathroom, Dumbledore pounced, “Ah Mr Creevey, I would be most interested in a copy of your photographs taken tonight.

Colin's smile never faltered, "I'm sorry headmaster but I have signed a contract giving Harry and the Quibbler exclusive rights to my pictures until the summer. I'm going to have my pictures published!"

"Foolish boy, you're too young to sign a contract," sneered Snape

"Oh I know that sir so Professor McGonagall signed it as my head of house, it's not for a lot of money but Harry's already given me a fortune tonight so that didn't matter. I am now the only person allowed to take Harry's picture with only the Quibbler able to print it, I would have paid any amount of money for this opportunity."

Minerva chose that moment to exit into the toilet, "Is there a problem here?"

Albus didn't want her ire directed at him, she would be needed for bringing Potter back to heel, "We were just discussing Mr Creevey's contract and why you felt that I didn't need to be involved in the business negotiations."

"Since the sum involved was one galleon I felt confident in my abilities to handle the negotiations, for that Mr Creevey gets a wonderful opportunity to perhaps turn something he loves into a career. He will receive accreditation in the newspaper for every picture they print and a payment based on sales. Unlike some present here, Mr Potter has proven that his integrity and honesty is beyond reproach so there is little chance of financial exploitation in this case." She left to escort Colin back to the Gryffindor common room, the lad was desperate to develop his film.

Pomona was last to exit and Albus groaned as the sinks moved back into place, "Tell it to open again, if that egotistic arse Potter can manage it then surely you can." Snape was almost pleading with Dumbledore now at the thought of all those prized potions ingredients slipping away from him.

"Alas Severus parseltongue can only be spoken by a parselmouth, its not a language that can be learned like Mermish, rather a special ability that very, very few possess, otherwise you would have

hundreds of people talking to snakes. Did they say anything before you left Pomona?”

She really had to bite her lip to control her laugh, “I was advised to bring you both some cocoa later as you were in for a long night.”

Pomona allowed her laughter its release as she walked along the corridor, leaving the two men alone in the girl’s toilet.

“It is as I feared Severus, they have another method of leaving the chamber. Were you able to ascertain any information from Mr Potter earlier?”

Snape actually appeared embarrassed, “Both Potter and Granger’s minds are now totally closed to us, even a few seconds scanning the Lovegood girl leaves you with a blinding headache and no way to discern if the information gained is fact or fiction. Do you think it would be worth asking Fawkes again if he would take us down there?”

Dumbledore shook his head, “He has refused on every occasion, last time he disappeared for nearly three weeks. I’m afraid to continue our vigil here would be fruitless so I suggest we turn in for the night.”

Both left and set off in the direction of their respective quarters, Severus wasn’t exactly paying attention as he had a few other things on his mind, after walking for ten minutes though, and once again finding himself at the entrance hall, he began to suspect everything was not as it should be. He tried once more to reach his quarters but again found himself unerringly ending up at the entrance hall, deciding to inform Albus of this latest prank of the Weasleys he changed direction to the headmaster’s office. Three times in the next ten minutes saw him standing perplexed in the entrance hall, no matter what route he chose the castle appeared to shepherd him back here. The problem now was exasperated ten fold by the pressing fact that, after spending most of the evening standing in one, Severus Snape was now in dire need of a toilet.

He tried to call for an elf with a chamber pot but even that didn't work, reluctantly he passed through the doors to the outside, looking for a dark place up against a wall.

His welcome relief was short lived though as, when he attempted to re-enter the castle. The potion's master was denied access for the second time tonight, Severus Snape was left standing in the cold and dark literally without a pot to piss in.

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Back in the chamber Hermione had a question she couldn't wait any longer to ask her betrothed. "Harry, who is Sal?"

Harry turned to their blond companion, "Luna I'm really trusting you a lot with this information but it's definitely not for repeating, far less printing."

Luna had never had someone place their trust in her before and was determined to be worthy of it, "I won't let either of you down."

Harry held out his hand that now contained three rings, the lion on Gryffindors appeared to be awakening from sleep while the snake of Slytherin was clearly animated, "This is Sal, I think it's a bit like the marauders putting a piece of their personality into the map but this wasn't done by four students. I've felt them getting stronger since we came back to the castle, it's as if they can talk to Hogwarts herself. Sal here hated Snape instantly and despises Riddle, that's why he was happy to choose me as the heir of Slytherin."

Luna tried to remain calm but it was difficult, "Let me see if I've got this right, you're Lord Potter, head of an Ancient and Noble Family, the Heir of Gryffindor, the Heir of Slytherin and a Tri-Wizard Champion representing the goblins, what the hell do I call you?"

"My friends call me Harry, Luna, will that be ok for you?"

Luna was so choked she could only nod as Sal began hissing.

“Sal said there is a library of sorts down here, that is if the half-blood bastard hasn’t ransacked it, he really doesn’t like Riddle.”

Luna was trying to get her emotions back under control as they started walking in the direction aHHHHHarry had indicated but a few things Harry said were confusing her, “Harry aren’t you a half-blood and who is this Riddle?”

“Luna blood purity means nothing to me but it meant everything to Riddle, so much so that he changed his name from that of his hated muggle father to one you might recognise, Voldemort!”

Hermione now had a question, “Does that mean that Salazar was not a blood purist?”

“Oh I think that Sal here is quite the snob but it’s all about standards, would he like to see Hogwarts attended solely by purebloods – absolutely! Would he brutally torture and kill all those not of pure blood in order to achieve this – never! The thought of trying to kill a one year old baby makes his blood boil and he will help us anyway he can to cleanse the world of that bastard Riddle, his words – not mine. Riddle has corrupted Slytherin house from a place of cunning and ambition to one where lies, cheating and corruption run rife. Take Draco as an example, he could hardly be classed as cunning and while definitely ambitious, he has neither the knowledge nor skill to achieve them, he is totally reliant on the Malfoy name getting him whatever he wants. Sal doesn’t consider him a Slytherin and wouldn’t have allowed him entry in his day. Sal said the basilisk was a guardian for this chamber, it was ordered never to leave and had been perfectly safe for almost a millennia until Riddle came along.”

They found the library after being instructed to tap certain bricks in order, an arch exactly like the one at Diagon Alley opened in the wall and Harry had a hard time holding both girls back until Sal confirmed it was safe. Harry left the two girls in their idea of heaven while he sought Barchoke to arrange the relocation of the books, the goblins eyes again did their Dobby impersonation as he gazed upon a treasure even greater than the basilisk, these volumes were priceless.

They'd spent time earlier today practicing the portkey creation spell, Harry had managed it quite quickly and his founder's heir status allowed him to create portkeys that took all the cases of basilisk parts and most of the goblins to the storage room in Gringotts they had visited today.

They had eight large crates of books, magically packed and shrunk as Barchoke informed Harry that their accommodation module was quite close to Hagrid's hut. He could only make a portkey to somewhere he'd been but he was well acquainted with the area around Hagrid's, they had no sooner appeared before spying what looked like a gigantic vault about a hundred meters ahead of them. Levitating the crates they headed for what was obviously their new home.

The doors swung open to reveal a massive entrance hall, someone had really done a number with the expansion charms on this place but the three teens were way too tired to give their quarters the appreciation they undoubtedly deserved. It was now after midnight and Harry had very little sleep the night before, Hermione not much better and Luna just had the most exhilarating night of her life.

Barchoke smiled as he pointed them in the direction of the bedrooms, the first one they came to had ALL Luna's belongings in it, the young blond had tears in her eyes at the kindness she'd been shown, she repeated Ginny's actions from earlier and kissed Harry on the cheek. "Thank you Harry, you have no idea how much this means to me."

"Actually I do, but that's a story for another time, we'll see you in the morning Luna."

The next room they came to had Crookshanks lying on the bed and bookshelves on two walls so it was a pretty safe bet this was Hermione's. The couple shared their first goodnight kiss before Harry dragged himself off to the next room and just collapsed on top of the bed, in no time at all he was dreaming of his brown eyed betrothed.

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Wormtail hated disturbing his master with news, but if he didn't and it proved important then there would be pain, there would be a lot of pain. "Master your agent has sent word, Potter has used being in the tournament to have himself declared an adult and formed an alliance with the goblins."

The fact that this news was met with silence was not a good sign, if his master ranted and raved then he could usually escape serious injury. Silence usually meant he was going to be creative in his punishment, for at least the millionth time Peter asked himself how he could have been stupid enough to become a death eater.

"Why did no one foresee this happening, do I have to think of everything myself? Yet again you have disappointed me Wormtail, Crucio!"

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Dan Granger's bedside digital clock displayed five forty eight, whoever was knocking on his door at this time in the morning better have a bloody good reason or there would be hell to pay. Emma heard her husband get up, then voices from the lounge peaked her curiosity, this saw her putting on her house coat and heading downstairs.

Emma had just arrived when her husband let out a roar as his temper exploded before shouting, "I'm going to kill the little bastard and then my daughter is coming straight home!" Emma immediately recognised Albus Dumbledore from his picture in Hogwarts a History; she also couldn't fail to notice the twinkle in his eyes at Dan's reaction.

A/N Luna will be a good friend but the story will remain H/Hr, hope to have next chapter of FG2 posted at start of week.

A big thank-you to Alorkin for providing a description of goblins in his review that describes my take on them better than I could, 'seeing them as a combination of Ferengi and Klingon. They have a strict ethical code, and they stick to it assiduously.'

As previously stated I'm not big on answering reviews, preferring to use my time to write the next chapter but I do read every one and they help me write the best story I can. As always, thanks for reading.

Chapter 3

Harry had the strangest feeling he was being watched so he slowly opened his eyes to see another pair the size of tennis balls staring back at him from a distance of about six inches, "Harry Potter sir should not be sleeping on top of the bed with all his clothes on!"

Harry dived off the bed in fright, "Dobby what the hell are you doing here?"

Dobby appeared confused, "Dobby is here to wake Harry Potter sir, it is morning."

Harry had regained his composure, "I understand that bit Dobby, but why are you here and not in Hogwarts?"

"Oh Dobby spoke with master Barchoke to see if he needed an elf to look after Harry Potter's new home, Dobby now works here!"

The delight in Dobby's expression stopped Harry saying any more, the little elf had his clothes all laid out for the day and there was a bathroom/shower en suite so the still sleepy wizard headed in that direction.

Twenty minutes later saw a showered and freshly dressed Harry heading out his room to explore their new accommodation, he heard voices coming from downstairs and set off in that direction to find Luna and Hermione sitting chatting.

"Morning you two, did everyone sleep well?" Harry wasn't sure what the protocol was for greeting your girlfriend in the morning but leaned down to kiss her cheek, Hermione turned her head to give him a quick peck on the lips and both of them were happy with that.

"Luna's already started working on the article for the Quibbler, I was telling her the paper came highly recommended by Barchoke."

"Yes apparently it appeals to their sense of humour, 'a lot of funny nonsense surrounding nuggets of truth' was how Barchoke put it. He

advised us to contact you as the Prophet is just a ministry mouthpiece.”

Luna was blushing, “Dad will be upset his cover is blown but printing this was going to raise our profile anyway, our worry has always been that publications openly criticising the ministry have a habit of changing ownership. Hiding the truth amongst articles that we had a lot of fun making up gave the ministry deniability as we were treated as a joke publication, we have accumulated quite a large circulation of loyal, discerning readers who can filter the truth from the manure.”

Harry put his hand on the young girl’s shoulder, “Speaking of filtering out the manure, anytime you want to talk about your stay in Ravenclaw we would be more than willing to listen. Both Hermione and I have first-hand experience of being bullied and your outburst when you thought we were cruelly teasing told us this was something you were used to. I would have helped you Luna whether you had newspaper connections or not and hope we can find some time for the three of us just to sit and chat, I’ve always room for more friends.”

Luna felt as if her heart would burst, “Thanks Harry, Dobby is going to bring me breakfast here as I want to get this to dad today, would you both like to join me?”

“We would love to but I think it’s important for us to appear in the great hall for breakfast, we need to find out the reaction to what happened last night. I also want to see what happened to Ron, I’m mad at him but hope he’s alright, he’s a jealous git with a bad temper but I wouldn’t like to see him maimed for life. How about you ask Dobby to prepare us lunch and we’ll all have here?”

A beaming Luna nodded in agreement as Harry and Hermione headed towards the castle.

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A furious Severus Snape had been trying to gain access to the castle since first light with no luck, but now had an idea as he headed back to Hogsmead where he’d spent the night. Faced with the prospects of Hagrid’s hut or the three broomsticks, Madam Rosmerta’s charms

had easily won against the half-giant's snores and that slobbering dog of his.

Zooming back to Hogwarts on a borrowed broom he headed for the astronomy tower, they would have to rise very early in the morning to get the better of him. Severus opened the door and found himself blasted right over the parapet; the only thing that saved his broken body from being found at the bottom of the tower was the broom in his hand.

It was a shaken Severus who had managed to mount the broom as he was falling and gain control of the situation in the nick of time. This had ceased to be a game anymore so he was admitting defeat and heading back to Hogsmead with the intention of sending an owl to Albus. He was now certain this prank was beyond those blasted Weasley twins and he couldn't think of any other candidates capable of pulling this off, he was so caught up in his deliberations he never noticed Harry and Hermione as they headed into the castle.

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Harry and Hermione entered the great hall and were certain they had made the right decision, it was as if the whole school were waiting to see what would happen next, they didn't have long to wait.

A few people were making straight for them but all were headed off by the headmaster, Albus wanted to get to them first. "Miss Granger, your presence is required in Professor McGonagall's office immediately." Both teens turned to leave but Albus didn't want that, "Mr Potter your presence is neither required nor allowed, this is a private matter."

Harry confronted Dumbledore face to face, "Since Miss Granger is my betrothed the only way to bar my presence is if the lady in question requested it."

Hermione quickly replied, "I don't know what the matter is but I want Harry there."

They turned to leave when Albus made a grab for Harry's arm, "I won't allow that!"

Harry looked down at Dumbledore's wrinkled hand on his arm before placing his other hand on top of the old wizard's, intending to remove it, the sizzle could be clearly heard before the headmaster's yell of pain preceded him hastily withdrawing his now blackened hand from Harry but the young man's words hurt a lot more than the burn.

"It would appear professor that my mother's protection is still keeping me safe from evil," he glanced at Hermione, "Love is really such a powerful force, you wouldn't happen to know how my name ended up in that cup would you headmaster?"

A totally stunned Dumbledore stood staring at his blackened hand as the boy's words drilled through his brain, had he become evil? He was aware that if he didn't satisfy Harry with an answer then he would lose the lad forever, not to mention most of the school was watching, he pulled out his wand. "I, Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore swear on my life and magic that I did not knowingly play any part in Harry Potter's name being entered in the goblet of fire."

The resulting flash again illuminated the hall before a phoenix patronus made an appearance, Harry bowed in acknowledgement of the old wizard's actions, "Thank you for that sir, there is a long list of people wishing to do me harm and it pleases me more than I can say that your name is no longer on it."

Poppy led the old wizard in the direction of the infirmary as Albus was reliving years of decisions he'd made concerning Harry while trying to discern why the boy could ever think he was evil. The end result though was whatever force protected the boy obviously classed him as such which meant Harry must consider him so, it was imperative that he fix this problem. Albus didn't think he was being overly dramatic when he thought that the fate of the world could rest on this and then he remembered what was waiting for them in Minerva's office, "Oh Merlin! What have I done?"

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Harry was trying to reassure his girlfriend, "Sal said it's superficial and Pomfrey will have his hand as good as new in a day or so, it was only being compared to the Voldemort possessed Quirrell that got him to make that oath." They had reached McGonagall's door and her call of enter had Harry opening the door for Hermione, only to stumble into the back of her as she abruptly stopped with a gasp.

Minerva was livid with Albus, he'd taken his manipulations a step too far here and if she lost one of the best students Gryffindor ever had through it, she would tear strips off him. He'd wound the Grangers up and then just dumped them in her office, promising to send Hermione to them and leaving her to deal with the shit while he keeps his hands clean. She had just about calmed the father down when Hermione entered and gasped, unfortunately she put her hand over her mouth and her beautiful new ring was there for all to see.

"What the hell do you think you're playing at young lady, that ring is coming off this very second and then I'll deal with the bloody boyfriend!" Dan grabbed his daughter's hand with the intention of removing her ring, this was a mistake and he found himself flying across the room with the screams of his daughter and wife ringing in his ears.

McGonagall now had her wand out, no one was attacking her students, Harry meanwhile had both his arms comfortably around Hermione and whispering in her ear, "It's ok, there was a cushioning charm on the wall, Hogwarts knows he's your father but only we are allowed to remove that ring."

Emma was trying to help Dan up when he saw the boy with his arms around his little girl, it was like a red rag to a bull, he sprang at them only to find himself frozen by Minerva's wand, "We are going to sit and discuss this like civilised adults, she may be your daughter but in this castle I'm charged with her safety. If you can do that I will release the body bind."

Emma had both hands on Dan's arm, "I promise you professor, he'll behave."

Minerva released him and Emma brokered no argument as she plonked him down in a chair and practically sat on him.

Hermione was seated beside Harry, she'd never seen her dad this angry and couldn't understand what was happening here, McGonagall was no help, "Miss Granger, I have no idea what's going on, the headmaster brought your parents here and told me he would send you to my office. Your father is clearly upset but won't tell me why so I'm in the dark as much as you."

"Daddy what's happened? What's the matter?"

"You sit there, wearing the ring of the boy you're now living with and ask me what the matter is? I thought we raised you better than that." Dan was now yelling but Harry was on his feet.

"Mr Granger this is our first meeting and I can already tell Hermione takes her intelligence after her mother, the emphasis you put on the phrase 'living together' is very upsetting to your daughter, upsetting and downright hurtful that you would believe such a thing of her."

"The headmaster said you'd turned Hermione's head by giving her a fortune and that ring must be worth one as well, my daughter's never had a boyfriend then along comes this rich lord, lavishing her with gifts and attention to bowl my little girl right off her feet."

Harry turned to face Hermione, "It's beginning to make sense now, no wonder he tried to stop me from coming up here. You do know I would have come after you, right?"

Hermione gave a weak smile and nodded.

Minerva felt powerful wards going up around her office and she looked to Harry for an explanation, "Professor, I need to know how much we can trust you, Dumbledore has betrayed ours yet again, if you scan Mr Granger you will find a mild compulsion charm, I would suggest it was to get his daughter as far away from me as possible. If you could lift that charm and promise to keep our secrets then we can

talk, if not we four will leave to our new accommodation and Hermione and I will be leaving Hogwarts today.”

She found the charm exactly as Harry had said and was now ready to blow her top, “Mr Potter as long as these secrets doesn’t endanger anyone then I will keep them.”

It was as if a switch had been thrown on the Grangers but for different reasons, Dan felt a lot of the aggression leave him while Emma reacted to the name Minerva had just used. “Potter, as in Harry Potter?” she received a nod, “But the headmaster told us it was some lord who was here for a competition, he implied that this foreigner had just met Hermione and she was now living with him. We’ve been hearing about Harry Potter since Hermione first set foot in this place.”

“The headmaster doesn’t actually lie, he just gives a few facts and leads you in a specific direction towards the conclusions he wants you to draw. I have been illegally entered in a competition that only adults are supposed to participate in, my goblin friends used this as an argument to have me made an adult, hence Lord Potter. We were told the competition had been abandoned in years past because it got too dangerous, our research brought up that one of the tasks usually has someone close to the competitor taken as a hostage to be rescued, the last competition saw two of the three hostages severely injured and one of the competitors killed.” Harry was right about the intelligence because Emma caught on a lot quicker than Dan.

“I will never give my permission for my daughter to be used as a hostage!”

It was Harry though who had to break the news to them, “Unfortunately Mrs Granger you wouldn’t even be asked and your objections ignored anyway, Hermione has been my best friend for three years and my girlfriend for only a day but she wears my ring because, as the betrothed of Lord Potter they can’t touch her. Hermione’s safety was my only concern here, neither of us will be rushing into anything and all this ring signifies is that we’re serious about each other. Our friendship is so important to us we would never have risked dating if we weren’t serious about each other. Professor,

this is the bit I need you to keep secret, I am a founder's heir which means the castle itself will protect me and mine, while Hermione wears that ring as my betrothed the castle itself will keep her safe."

McGonagall was joining the dots, "That's what happened to Mr Weasley's hand!"

"Yes, when he fired a curse at us the castle exploded his wand, the headmaster tried to physically stop me coming up here and received a burned hand, that's also why Mr Granger couldn't remove her ring, Hogwarts will protect Hermione."

Dan was feeling rather sheepish, he'd come to Hogwarts to withdraw Hermione and hopefully beat the shit out of this foreign lord who'd corrupted his princess, instead he finds the boy's her best friend who has done more than the professors to keep his little girl safe, he still had questions though, "What about the fortune the headmaster mentioned, I'd like to know the reason behind that."

"I claimed the carcass of the basilisk I had killed and shared the proceeds equally amongst its victims, including one girl who has since graduated."

"How much is a fortune?" Emma asked.

Hermione was sitting looking at her shoes, "About a quarter of a million pounds, Harry I don't feel too good, can we go back to our quarters now."

Dan had cooled down enough that Emma felt she could go to Hermione, but her daughter pulled away. "How could you even think that about me, far less say it? Harry's the nicest boy you could ever meet yet you had him practically administering love potions and raping me! I don't know if I can forgive you for that."

Harry's arms once again going around his daughter didn't bother Dan, the hurt his daughter's words caused left him feeling hollow inside but the space gradually filled with anger as the young man spoke.

“Hermione love, you need to think about this, your parents have just been played by a master. Our beloved headmaster would portray it as if the famous Victor Krum had swept you off your feet and you were now sharing his ship with him, given those circumstances your parents’ actions are understandable. You inhabit a world they know very little about, then Albus Dumbledore comes to their house and tells them their daughter is in grave danger, they clearly love you very much so what else were they supposed to do?”

Emma’s emotions had been all over the place since this morning, her instinct was that the headmaster had another agenda but no parent can ignore a warning their child is in danger, Harry was right, they’d been manipulated by an expert. “Harry do you have any idea why the headmaster would do this?”

“Oh that’s easy, control of me! Hermione’s stuck by me through thick and thin and our betrothal, along with me expressing my independence must have scared him. The headmaster doesn’t want to lose control of his bait.”

“Mr Potter I think that’s quite enough!”

McGonagall’s reprimand was quite enough for Hermione, “No I don’t think that’s anywhere near enough, you all agreed that the only reason Harry’s name was entered is because someone is again trying to kill him but you just forced him to compete anyway! How many people in that room knew the competition could be cancelled and the names redrawn later? Not one person spoke up to defend my Harry, no one ever speaks up or steps forward to defend my Harry and frankly I think THAT is quite enough. He has to stay here to compete in this travesty and if that isn’t dangerous enough someone is trying to kill him AGAIN! I think this will be my last year at Hogwarts and I will do everything in my power to see Harry comes with me.”

Harry still had his arms around Hermione, “Where you go, I go Hermione.”

Emma had never seen her quiet, studious daughter like this, Professor McGonagall was practically her role model yet Hermione

had just tore into the woman, she was aware her daughter liked Harry but apparently her feelings went well beyond like, thankfully it was blatantly obvious that the young man in question returned those feelings with the same measure. Emma tried to lighten the tension, "Harry, you're supposed to play hard to get."

"Not with Hermione ma'am, she's too special to risk losing over stupid games."

Dan thought he had his facts right but after his recent debacle he was going to make sure, "Are you saying the old man got us out of bed, filled our heads with this bullshit, cast some sort of spell on me and then left us here just so he could break up a couple of school kids who'd just started dating? I'm finding this very hard to believe right now."

Minerva was still reeling from Hermione's outburst, and declaration of leaving Hogwarts but she knew both teens were far too modest to answer her father's question. "The piece of information you are missing Mr Granger is that Harry is just about the most famous wizard in our world, his betrothal to your daughter will be front page news and spill onto quite a few pages inside as well I would imagine. Lord Potter here is apparently also very wealthy, I have no idea how much he's worth but this young man gave over a million of your pounds away last night and didn't bat an eyelid."

"Professor I didn't feel that money was mine, rather it should go to the people who'd suffered months in the infirmary. I'm also famous because my parents died and I didn't, not something I want to boast about. The Headmaster likes to keep me on a tight leash, even dictating where I go during the summer holidays but that's all at an end now. Mr and Mrs Granger, would you like to see where Hermione is now living? To tell the truth we haven't really had time for a good look around ourselves yet, we were so tired after our adventures yesterday I fell asleep fully clothed on top of my bed." Harry was now holding Hermione's hand and trying to convey that this was something they needed to do, he didn't want his girlfriend fighting with her parents, especially over him.

Emma could see what Harry was trying to do and wanted to help, "We would love to, Hermione's life at Hogwarts is a complete mystery to us and anything we can learn would be very welcome."

Harry took a book out his bag and turned it into a portkey, much to McGonagall's astonishment. "The mystery of how you got out of the chamber is solved, wouldn't it be better just to walk?"

Harry smiled, "Same reason we used them to get out the chamber, there are certain people we'd rather avoid. Please touch the book."

Minerva was about to ask if she could accompany them when they disappeared, it suddenly dawned on her that she'd never even asked which founder he was heir to, she'd just assumed it was Gryffindor.

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Three Gryffindors with red hair were currently haranguing a forth, the littlest Weasley was not pulling any punches with her older brother. "How can anyone plan six moves ahead in chess yet be so bloody stupid not to see what's right under their nose, do you honestly think Harry wants more fame or a thousand galleons enough to be branded a liar and cheat by his so-called best friend? What the hell were you thinking firing a curse at him and Hermione, have you got so many friends you can afford to throw the best two you'll ever have away? Mum's going to go mental when McGonagall tells her what happened!"

Ron had been sitting in bed, trying to ignore all the points his sister was making, 'Harry's got everything' running through his mind. The mention of his mother crashed through his feeble defences like a cannon ball, "Why would McGonagall contact mum?"

Ginny couldn't answer, her brother's stupidity had rendered her speechless so George was left to do the honours, "Correct me if I'm wrong but didn't you fire a curse at two unarmed students during dinner in the middle of the great hall?"

"It didn't hit anybody, I'm the injured one here!"

“Well George I think we can safely say it’s official, mum gave all the good stuff to the five older brothers so by the time Ron came along there was nothing left, thank Merlin Ginny’s a girl, can you imagine how much of a twat a seventh son would be?”

“True my twin, but I don’t think we should feel responsible, just because we got a double dose.”

“Knock it off you two, this moron is in so much trouble yet so bloody thick and full of Harry Potter envy that he can’t get his head far enough out his arse to see it!”

“Oh there speaks the girl with her own vault, what the hell did I get?”

Ginny could at least say they had tried, “Ron I think you are going to get everything you deserve.”

With that they left their brother to ferment in his self-induced pity party.

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The party of four arrived in the large reception hall, “This will give you some idea of how tired we were last night, those crates are full of extremely rare books that no one has read for a thousand year and yet we all headed straight to bed.”

Harry could see the look of longing in Emma at the mention of rare books and guessed that’s where Hermione inherited her passion.

“Harry, Hermione, you need to come and see these!”

They followed the sound of Luna’s voice and found her sitting at a table adorned with photographs from the chamber, “Colin dropped by with the pictures and they’re unbelievable, god job you took others down with you because I was there and still don’t believe it. Colin seemed quite disappointed you weren’t here Harry, he wanted to show you these himself...Oh Hello!” Luna had finally looked up from the pictures and noticed the two adults.

“Luna this is my mum and dad, we’re going to have a tour of this place, would you like to join us?”

Luna didn’t ask why Hermione’s parents were there, or why her new friend looked so strained, she figured they would tell her later if they wanted her to know. “Oh yes please, I’ve almost got this article finished but am having a hard time deciding what picture to use.”

Dan couldn’t take his eyes off the pictures, with the kids standing in front of the monster you got some idea towards the scale of the beast. “What the hell is that?”

“That’s what put me in the infirmary for over three weeks, Harry killed it with a sword.”

Dan couldn’t believe what his daughter was saying but, to the best of their knowledge she’d never lied to them. The fact that neither Harry nor the girl called Luna disagreed with Hermione chilled their blood, the idea that this thing had nearly cost Hermione her life having more effect than the thought of a twelve year old Harry killing the beast. Dan was forced to reassess his plan of kicking the boyfriend’s arse, if he faced this thing when he was twelve then the lad was hardly likely to find Dan the dentist scary!

They started the tour upstairs as Hermione made a point of showing her bedroom to her parents, she then commented that Harry’s room was smaller than hers and Luna’s.

“After saying goodnight I just collapsed onto the nearest available bed, when Dobby woke me up all my stuff was in the room.” The bedroom two doors down was obviously the master bedroom and gave Harry an idea, “Mr and Mrs Granger, the first task takes place on the twenty forth of this month, would you like to attend as my guests? You could even stay here for a few days and get a flavour of the magical world.”

Again Emma cottoned on very quickly to what Harry was attempting and once more she was very willing to help him out. He wanted them to see there was nothing untoward going on here and let them spend

time with Hermione, how could she say no to that. “Harry we would be delighted to accept but we couldn’t take your bedroom off you.”

“Mrs Granger, the room I’m currently in is larger and more luxurious than anywhere I’ve ever stayed, trust me when I say I’m very happy there.”

They continued their tour, finding a training room that allowed Hermione to display her magic to Dan and Emma for the first time, both were amazed as she had objects flying through the air, changing from one thing to another with eventually about a dozen bunny rabbits hopping around the room, one last wave of her wand and everything returned to normal. A hug from a proud mother went a long way to repairing the damage done this morning.

A compact gym, small potions lab and kitchen were followed by an area that had a sauna and large whirlpool tub, producing blushes from the teens and worrying glances from the adults.

It was the last room they visited though that was the jewel in the crown, a library that had all three females drooling, there was a fireplace with two incredibly comfortable looking sofas either side of it as well as a few work tables set around the room. With bookcases holding at least ten thousand volumes, when the books from the crates were added this would rival, if not surpass Hogwarts.

“Ok Dan, how quickly can we sell the practice and move in here?” Emma wasn’t entirely joking.

“Mrs Granger if we can get Hermione to make you a portkey home then I can go with you to make reusable ones that will take you between your house and here whenever you want.”

“Harry we are going to be spending so much time here I insist you call me Emma, otherwise I’ll need to start calling you Lord Potter.”

They only escaped the library when Dobby announced that lunch was ready, having the food appear on the table as soon as they sat down

was a shock to the Grangers until Hermione explained about house elves.

“Can non magical people employ one, that would be fabulous to sit down after fixing teeth all day to a home cooked meal with no clearing up to do either.”

Dobby popped right at Emma’s elbow, “Would Missis Granger like a house elf? Dobby’s friend Winky is looking for a new family and would be honoured to serve friends of Harry Potter.”

“Would Winky take wages Dobby?” Hermione asked, only to be interrupted by the house elf in question making a personal appearance.

To say that Winky wasn’t adjusting to being set free as well as Dobby would have been a gross understatement, the little elf looked ill, dirty and drunk, not a good combination which was made appear worse as her speech was slurred also, “Winky may be bad elf but not wanting wages, Winky wants to be part of family again.”

They all felt sorry for the distraught elf but it was Luna who acted, “Winky if you really want to be part of a family then perhaps you would consider mine, my dad is at work most days so you could be here with Dobby, just make sure daddy occasionally eats something and has clean underwear.”

The change in her demeanour was instantaneous and remarkable, even the thought of someone wanting the little elf had her standing straighter and looking better, “Miss would want Winky in her family?”

“Only if it makes you happy and get’s you looking after yourself again, I have an article to finish then you can take it to daddy and tell him what I said, Dobby could you look after her until then?”

Dobby was bouncing with excitement before popping away with Winky, Hermione wanted to be angry at the thought of the little elf’s impending enslavement but she couldn’t deny the evidence of her own eyes. Winky’s condition almost had her in tears until her soft

spoken new friend offered the desperate elf a home, the wonder and joy being broadcast by Winky would have left any objection of Hermione's looking pretty selfish, in this case Winky's happiness was clearly more important than her morals.

She'd closely observed as Harry learned the portkey charm and now had an opportunity to try it herself, Hermione imagined their enclosed back garden and applied it to Harry's scarf, the four then said cheerio to Luna as they left to walk outside the wards.

When they left Dan was amazed at the solid looking cube with the large metal door, guarded by what Hermione claimed were security goblins, it really was magic how it looked so different on the inside. He and Emma had started the day worried sick about Hermione but were happier with her situation now than at anytime since she'd started attending this bloody place. Having visited her new accommodation, met the boyfriend and witnessed first hand what it was like to have a magical castle protecting their daughter, Dan would sleep soundly tonight. He'd wondered for years how he would feel when faced with the dreaded boyfriend only to discover that it was nothing like he'd imagined, that he was sure could be accredited entirely to said boyfriend being Harry Potter.

Dan couldn't think of any other young lad who had such an air of chivalry about them, Hermione certainly didn't do things by half's, not only was her boyfriend a gentleman but a Lord to boot!

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Albus was at an absolute loss with no idea what to do next, Severus couldn't gain access to the castle, Fawkes had disappeared when asked to fetch the potion's master and hadn't been seen since, on top of that no one had yet left Minerva's office and he couldn't get in.

The headmaster didn't feel any change in the castle wards yet Minerva's office was blocked to him, when the portraits reported that she'd left for her afternoon class he hurried to intercept her, Albus needed to know what had transpired with the Grangers. Unfortunately for the headmaster Minerva's anger had not abated one iota but now she had a target to release it on, which she promptly did.

“Albus Dumbledore, what possessed you to place that charm on Miss Granger’s father? You should be ashamed of yourself for doing that to a muggle, no you should be arrested for interfering with the betrothal of Lord Potter. What gives you the right to do such a thing?”

“I thought it was necessary and for the best, does Harry know?”

“For the best, for who’s best? Yes Harry knows, it was he who detected that horrible spell, I was about to assure him you would never do such a thing when I discovered he was correct. I never thought you could stoop so low Albus.”

The headmaster felt as if he’d been physically assaulted, “What was Harry’s reaction?”

“Both he and Miss Granger have indicated they will be leaving Hogwarts when the competition ends.”

“No, he can’t!”

Minerva unloaded both barrels on the wilting Dumbledore, “Yes he bloody well can and I for one don’t blame either of them, the person I blame is standing right in front of me! I have a class of second year students awaiting, they are far more deserving of my time than you, good-day headmaster.”

Albus was left standing in the corridor surrounded by his shattered schemes but McGonagall hadn’t exactly been quiet in her remonstrations, they had been heard by more than one pair of ears. By the time none of the new trio turned up for dinner the entire school was aware of Dumbledore’s manipulations and tomorrow’s Quibbler would only add to his pain.

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Luna had been brought up to speed on what had transpired with Hermione’s parents that morning and none of them had felt like facing the rest of Hogwarts so they had chatted and built upon their first

tenuous bonds of friendship, “I didn’t like lying to McGonagall but I want to keep Sal a secret for now and don’t want anyone to know just how much the goblins are helping. It would feel like cheating if I had any intention of winning, I plan on staying out the way and let the other three fight it out for eternal glory, I’ll just be eternally grateful if I make it out in one piece.”

All three had decided on an early night when Dobby appeared, “Harry Potter, the goblins have reported that professor Lupin and his dog are at the door, do you wish to allow them in?”

“Yes please Dobby, Luna you’re about to learn another of our secrets and the Quibbler’s next front page story, just don’t be alarmed and trust us.”

Luna smiled at him, “I trust you Harry...”

The little blond never got to say anymore as a massive black dog bounded into the room and flattened the boy she’d been speaking to, it proceeded to slobber all over him as Hermione buckled in laughter at his predicament, Luna thought staying here was so much fun.

A/N Thanks for reading.

Next chapter I publish will be ‘Can’t 4’ before moving on to write a couple of chapters for FG2.

Chapter 4

Dan Granger was again rudely awakened, but this time by an owl delivering the latest edition of the Quibbler. Luna had added their name to the newspaper's subscription list, he unrolled the issue to find that Professor McGonagall was indeed correct; Hermione's betrothal to Harry was front page news.

Lord Who Lived Betrothed to Best Friend

In a move that caught the magical world by surprise Lord Harry James Potter became betrothed to long time best friend Hermione Jane Granger, there was no surprise in his choice of young lady who'd clearly captured his heart but rather in Harry taking on the mantle of Lord Potter at age fourteen. When asked why he had taken this unusual step Lord Potter's reply was, to say the least, thought provoking.

"The 'responsible' adults controlling my life have failed me for the last time, recently my name was entered into a dangerous competition reserved for adults by some unknown person who wishes me harm. Ministry officials and Headmaster Dumbledore proclaimed I must compete, even though the rules allowed a time for the outcome to be declared void and the names redrawn. The side effect of this is that both ministry and school have recognised Harry James Potter as an adult by forcing me to compete, therefore I claimed my inheritance and will stand on my own two feet from now on. Miss Granger has been my constant companion through my troubled times in the magical world who, along with myself has been attacked by a troll, giant three-headed dog, an enormous basilisk and Dementors while attending Hogwarts. In not one of these instances were either myself or my betrothed saved by a member of the Hogwarts staff. This tournament will at least give my betrothed and myself a chance to see first hand what other magical schools have to offer while we consider our future."

This reporter can confirm the pictures that appear here are totally genuine as she was included in a large party of students, staff and goblins Lord Potter lead down into Salazar Slytherin's fabled chamber of secrets. He had claimed the carcass by right of conquest and sold

it to the goblins, Lord Potter then divided the gold he received equally amongst those who had been attacked by the beast.

Lord Potter has moved out of Hogwarts, as the school cannot have two champions, into accommodation provided by his sponsors, Gringotts Wizarding Bank.

Gringotts will also be involved with serving a number of writs today as Lord Potter exercises his legal rights, "Too many unscrupulous people are making gold of my name and image by selling products un-associated and unendorsed by me. They are cheating and lying to the public and it stops now, from this day onward the only place you will see my name or image printed will be in the Quibbler. I have signed a contract giving them exclusive rights and anyone breaking this will face the wrath of goblin financial law."

We at the quibbler are understandably delighted with this arrangement and believe the financial cost incurred was gold well spent.

Luna had eventually sent all the pictures and let her father decide which ones to use, he'd chosen a close-up with Harry, Hermione and the basilisk's head as background and another group picture of all the students who were allowed down there, this gave a better indication of just how big the beast was.

Dan was reading the inside of the paper which gave a review of Harry's history and some of the things he'd been involved in since attending Hogwarts, they would certainly be having a talk with Hermione when they visited their new accommodation module this weekend. At no time when she was describing her rescue from the girl's bathroom was a twelve foot mountain troll mentioned, Dan was sure he would have remembered and continued reading to see what else had been left unsaid. He was also hoping for a definition of what a dementor was though even the name sounded scary.

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Molly Weasley received the quibbler almost at the same time as a letter from Ginny, the headline led the fearful witch to tear open her

daughter's note, expecting to have to console her 'Harry Potter obsessed' daughter. To her astonishment she found Ginny's letter to be incredibly upbeat, though Molly had to sit down when she discovered her daughter had returned to the chamber, the fifty thousand galleons left her feeling dizzy as well.

When she read the part about Ron being incredibly jealous and throwing a temper tantrum she expected to be hearing from Minerva soon, the Hogwarts owl arrived less than ten minutes later but with a request for Arthur and her to visit the school concerning their youngest son's behaviour. This was bad, even the twins never had them summoned to Hogwarts.

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Luna lay in her lovely new room trying to figure out how her life got so complicated so quickly, and also so good! She'd almost passed out with fright when the big dog Harry was play-wrestling with on the floor transformed into Sirius Black, only the sight of Hermione still laughing and Professor Lupin standing there with a massive grin on his face kept her from screaming in panic. Harry also appeared delighted to see the most hunted wizard in Britain who supposedly was responsible for seeing his parents murdered, Harry said this was the Quibblers next story and she couldn't wait to hear it.

With all thoughts of an early night now forgotten Luna got to hear it, and proceeded to curse profusely at the shocking hand fate had dealt her friend. Shocking could also describe her friend's attitude to her outburst, "Luna if you reacted like that to some of those bullying Ravenclaws I'm willing to bet they would soon leave you alone, you can be one scary girl when you want to be."

Harry's arm around her shoulder and beaming smile completely removed any vestige of hurt or reprimand, all she felt was friendship and even respect, these were completely new experiences for Luna but ones that she was certain could become terribly addictive with a little more exposure.

Luna was aware that the Quibbler printing Sirius Black's story would place them squarely in direct opposition to the ministry, this was

something they had went to great lengths to avoid in the past but perhaps it was time to take a stand.

She would have to speak to Harry about allowing her father to visit here, he always encouraged her to write however Luna recognised this story was far too big for her to handle. This story would redefine the Quibbler in people's minds forever, there would be no turning back to concocting articles on crumple horned snorkack's after documenting the injustices heaped upon Sirius. Revealing ministry incompetence would be bad enough for the paper yet the way certain things had to happen in a specific order for an innocent man to be vilified and locked away without even being questioned reeked of conspiracy, exposing that could be very bad and extremely dangerous.

They had talked last night and decided to wait until lunchtime before entering the castle, this would give her Quibbler article time to be absorbed without their presence adding to the commotion it would undoubtedly cause. All three weren't worried about missing some classes, with the facilities they had here and now a live-in professor, catching up with anything they missed would be a breeze.

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Draco Malfoy was not a happy puppy, he'd been delighted when the whole school had turned against Potter and there weren't words to describe how good he felt when the weasel's hand exploded into mush. While the highs were wonderful, the downturn had been traumatic for the blond Slytherin.

Potter's stance against Dumbledore, McGonagall and Snape had won him plaudits for sheer guts while pronouncing Diggory as Hogwarts champion and taking the magical oath were moves worthy of a Slytherin. Davis and Greengrass became instant celebrities at being the only two members of their house ever to set foot in their founder's secret chamber.

Their revelations that Potter held no ill will for their house, in fact would have been a Slytherin if not for his demand that the sorting hat not place him with Draco signalled the end of any good mood he had.

This effectively caused a split in the house with quite a few Slytherins openly expressing the view that Gryffindor got the better of the barter, with no sign of Snape to put an abrupt halt to these anarchistic views Draco was in danger of finding himself marginalised in a house he'd hoped to rule.

Sitting at breakfast he couldn't fail to notice the stir beginning to grip the hall, nor that its source exuded from students reading that rag the Quibbler. Draco was soon approached by some very worried looking Ravenclaws, "We managed to produce six badges so far but we've changed our minds, you can keep your money, we don't want paid."

Draco was left with half a dozen badges and his plan for flooding the school with them in tatters, he had to turn this flow of people taking Potter's side around otherwise it would become a tidal wave that swept everything before its path, including his own house. Now it would have to be a small protest and Draco hoped that Potter turned up in the castle soon, if he waited much longer there may not be five other students in the castle willing to wear them.

-oOoOo-

Harry came down to breakfast to find his godfather and girlfriend waiting on him, he gave Hermione a good morning kiss and any blush on his cheeks was purely down to remembering the way she had kissed him last night before going to bed. This had been her way of expressing how pleased she was with the manner he handled her parents, if this was her reward scheme then Harry intended to ensure that Hermione was pleased with him as often as possible.

"Ok you two, my breakfast cereal doesn't need anymore sweetness so let's just stop it there." Sirius joked, actually he was delighted these two had become a couple as they fitted together perfectly. He was slightly shocked at the betrothal aspect though, when the reason behind it became clear, Sirius earned a smile from Harry by saying his father would have done exactly the same.

Sirius wanted to know what Harry's plan was for winning the competition but couldn't believe his answer, "Don't you see though, winning the tournament would be the biggest prank of all! Imagine

their faces when Harry Potter gets his hands on the trophy, can you think of anything better than that?"

Harry just glanced towards Hermione and the expression on his face displayed quite clearly that the young wizard definitely could think of things better than some piece of tin.

Remus arrived, closely followed by Luna as the conversations switched from subject to subject until Luna asked the question she needed to, "Harry, could my dad come here and interview Sirius? We may not be able to force the ministry to grant him a trial however at least it will have people asking questions and throw some light onto his imprisonment."

It was Remus who answered, "Luna if your father printed that he'd met with Sirius then the ministry would arrest him, he would be questioned under truth serum as they're desperate to see the end to this problem."

Hermione attempted to offer a solution, "What if it was written as an interview with Harry and I? We reported what happened that night but no one wanted to listen, anything else can be put down to research we've done since."

"I think that is a great idea Hermione, would your dad go along with it Luna?"

"Well we can only ask him Harry, but I'm sure he will." Winky was called and a meeting set up for later this morning.

-oOoOo-

Albus had spent the morning with Severus trying to discover why the castle wouldn't allow him access, every scan he ran on his potions professor came back normal yet even the portkey he made to his office wouldn't activate when the Slytherin touched it.

“It must be the castle wards Albus, the same thing that happened to deny us access to the chamber. Potter is somehow responsible, I just know it!”

“Severus you really need to make your mind up, one moment you portray Harry as an attention seeking, mediocre at best wizard, then you want to blame him for a feat that neither of us can discover how it's being carried out. You've allowed your hatred of his father to colour your behaviour towards the boy since he set foot in Hogwarts, if this is Harry's doing can you really blame him!” Albus managed to stop the tirade that Severus was about to unleash to his stupid question, knowing full well the Slytherin irrationally blamed Harry for everything. “If it was Harry then I fear we will soon know as I might need to move in with Abe!”

After exhausting every idea they had Albus was forced in part to agree with Severus, the castle wards were the only reasonable explanation they had left. The thought of someone else controlling the castle terrified the headmaster, when a serving headmaster lost control of the wards it signified he was judged no longer fit for purpose, he actually might end up staying with his brother. Albus had expected to spend his final years here at Hogwarts and had even chosen his final resting place on the school grounds, he couldn't let that be taken away from him because of a few misunderstandings with a student.

Albus noticed the student in question leave the large vault / cube with two girls and head towards the castle, here was the chance to begin some repair work, he hurried his pace to catch them up while making sure his injured hand was clearly visible, Albus was not above using a bit of guilt-trip to get his way, Albus Dumbledore was not above using any means at his disposal.

“Ah Harry my boy, so pleased to see you heading into the castle, all three of you have missed classes but I suppose I can overlook it this time, I'm afraid I can't overlook Miss Lovegood leaving the Ravenclaw dorms to live in your accommodation. You may be able to claim responsibility for your betrothed and even appoint Miss Lovegood to

assist you but I can't allow her to leave the castle, she is my responsibility after all."

"Not according to the letter I have in my pocket from Mr Lovegood, he is very happy for Luna to be living with us and is withdrawing her from Ravenclaw house."

Hermione could hardly contain her anger at the old man, "Did you also overlook the fact that it is illegal to cast spells on muggles and that interfering in the betrothal of Lord Potter carries a sentence of time in Azkaban, where was your sense of responsibility there?"

Luna was also angry for his attempt at putting her back in the Ravenclaw dorm that had caused her so much hurt, "Apparently you also overlooked the illegality of placing a man in Azkaban without charges or a trial, wasn't that your responsibility as head of the Wizengamot to ensure things like that don't occur?"

Harry drove their point's home, "It would seem to me that you pick and choose which responsibilities you wish to honour, let me be perfectly clear here, you no longer have responsibilities for any of us three."

Dumbledore was unprepared for the venom in both girl's remarks but it was the coldness towards him in Harry's that worried the old wizard a lot more, "But Harry surely you can see the benefit of having advisers to assist ..." Albus was abruptly cut off, not something he was used to.

"I have a full team of advisors looking out for my interests, and to be perfectly frank they're currently advising me to contact the DMLE concerning your attempt to use Hermione's parents to break our betrothal. I am still trying to work out your motive for that though, combined with the burnt hand, the evidence against you is pretty compelling."

Albus didn't want to get onto the subject of Harry considering him evil so attempted to change the conversation slightly, "Harry there is so much going on at the moment, professor Snape has even found

himself barred from accessing the castle, I feel we could benefit from sitting down and having a clear the air talk.”

“I have nothing to say and have no wish to listen to you talk for an hour without actually saying anything, as to your potions teacher I think that may be catching as Hogwarts appears to have had enough of people using her for their own ends.” They had reached the castle doors now, “If you don’t mind we will wait here and let you enter, it wouldn’t do for us to be seen together and have people assuming we’re on friendly terms. I find your name has re-appeared very near the top of my people who wish me harm list, you may not have entered me in the competition but it was your responsibility to make sure nobody else did, you failed to protect me again sir!”

The sarcasm on the ‘sir’ just finished off Dumbledore’s morning, he would be mending no fences today and had better be ready to call in quite a few favours to keep his arse out of Azkaban if Harry carried out his threat. It was still being denied Hogwarts though that really scared him, he actually hesitated as he crossed the threshold into the castle and gave out a sigh of relief as Hogwarts let him enter. He needed something big to get Harry to once more at the very least respect him, that final ‘sir’ was the only form of courtesy shown towards him the entire time.

-oOoOo-

Draco watched the trio enter and instantly decided it was now or never, he hadn’t even been able to find enough people to wear the five extra badges and badly needed a victory to reclaim some respect. He led his posse over to the Gryffindor table knowing all eyes were now on him, the natural order had been restored.

“Hey Potter, like the badges?”

Harry got up and turned to face Malfoy and his goons, the badge displayed ‘support Cedric Diggory’ but then changed to reveal ‘Potter Stinks!’ he could see the blond Slytherin almost trembling with excitement in anticipation of his reaction.

Harry contemplated his response before answering, "Let me guess Malfoy, you paid a couple of Ravenclaws to make them because the charm work is way beyond your ability but you dictated the messages. Potter stinks is just about your level, come to think of it, with the combined efforts of Crabbe, Goyle and Parkinson that's actually pretty good, any seven-year-old would be proud of that slogan." Laughter began to break out in pockets around the hall as Malfoy's expression changed to that of a boy with his nuts trapped in a vice, Harry tightened the handle, "Miss Bulstrode the other three I expected but what have I done to you that deserves this?"

Millicent had been so glad for some people actually paying her attention she'd agreed with Draco, she'd thought being part of his group was better than no group at all, the lonely Slytherin was quickly realising how wrong she was. Millicent removed her badge, "You have done nothing to warrant this disrespect Lord Potter and I sincerely apologise, I made an error of judgement that I'm now ashamed off."

Harry was taken aback at this girl's bravery while Draco was left seething, "Apology accepted Miss Bulstrode, though my friends call me Harry, and thank you for your honesty, it's something that is in short supply in this place."

Millicent almost smiled, "Thank you Lord Potter but I don't think I've earned the right to call you Harry – yet!" with that she tossed the offending badge at Malfoy's feet before walking back to the Slytherin table with her head held high.

Harry wasn't sure if Malfoy was going to grab for his wand or burst into tears, with a final twist of the knife he sat down between Hermione and Luna with his back facing Draco. Harry didn't know which way Malfoy would go but it was tremendously reassuring to know the castle would protect them if he was stupid enough to pull his wand.

The outcome would never be known as McGonagall chose that moment to enter, she'd just had a meeting with the Weasley's and was in no mood to stand any nonsense, "Mr Malfoy, kindly explain why your group is at the Gryffindor table."

Draco was tongue tied but Pansy saved the day, though the words nearly choked her, "We were admiring Miss Granger's new ring, congratulations again you two."

Minerva knew there was more chance of Severus becoming a Gryffindor girls pin-up than Miss Parkinson congratulating Hermione, then she noticed the badges, "Support Cedric Diggory, well done Mr Malfoy, five points to Slytherin for that display of house unity."

Harry was drinking pumpkin juice at the time this remark was made, trying to drink and laugh at the same time is not recommended as Hermione pounded on his back, attracting McGonagall's attention.

"Oh he's alright professor, it's just that new cologne of his. It's rather powerful and catches your throat." This started sniggers off around the hall until Luna delivered the coup de grace.

In her most child-like voice she proclaimed, "Yeah Potter, you stink!"

The laughter erupted around the hall with even a few at the staff table having a good chuckle, with the headmaster sitting there and neither head of the houses involved present the rest of the staff had been powerless to intervene.

Albus had let the situation develop in an attempt to see if Harry had changed, the headmaster was sure that even last week the boy would have risen to the bait, instead he had masterfully deflated the posturing peacock that was Malfoy. Watching the two boys only the colour of their robes indicated who was the Slytherin, without that you would have placed your gold on it being Harry. The only difference Albus could detect was an infusion of confidence, he wasn't strutting about the place but emitted an aura proclaiming he wasn't going to take crap from anyone. Whatever team the boy had around him was working wonders, Albus was going to have to restrain his manipulations and hope an opening presented itself.

Minerva meanwhile wasn't in on the joke and getting pretty peeved, "Miss Lovegood, I would like an explanation as to why you're sitting at the Gryffindor table?"

Harry had recovered enough to approach her, Delivering the letter in his possession, "Miss Lovegood is no longer a member of Ravenclaw house, her father has placed her under my protection and she is there as our guest. We were still hoping to attend some lessons in the castle while our tutor's are organised, I'll understand if that's a problem."

"I don't foresee any problems with that and would like to offer my services as a tutor."

"Thank you professor and I'd be a fool to turn that offer down so I most willingly accept."

Albus saw an opening and went for it, "Mr Potter I would also like to offer my services as a tutor to you and your party." He became aware this was a mistake immediately as Harry's whole posture changed, it was so evident the whole hall couldn't fail to notice it.

"Yesterday you attempted to have my betrothed removed from Hogwarts, today you tried to place Luna back into an environment where she was mercilessly bullied by claiming you were responsible for her wellbeing, why the hell would we want you anywhere near us?"

Harry's words and McGonagall's record breaking scowl in the headmaster's direction confirmed the stories beyond a doubt

"Oh and headmaster, just to avoid any confusion, that's a no." Harry's attention was drawn to professor Flitwick who must have been standing on his chair.

"Lord Potter I have begun an investigation into the matter and rest assured appropriate punishments have already begun being administered to the guilty."

Harry glanced towards the Ravenclaw table to see a group of girls sitting with there heads bowed, he couldn't help but notice that one of them was Cho and that her prized prefects badge was no longer on

her robes, he was almost beginning to think whoever put his name in that goblet had done him a favour.

“Thank you Professor and may I say our door will always be open to you.” Having administered the final slap to Dumbledore, Harry sat back down. It was oh so tempting to banish him from the castle but Barchoke had advised against it, at the moment Dumbledore was in plain sight and they wanted him where they could see him.

Fleur and a few of her friends were sitting at the Ravenclaw table, the paper had said Potter was looking for a new school so their headmistress dispatched them to the castle, bringing the boy who lived to France would be quite the coup. After hearing of the chamber incident she'd tried to apologise for her 'little boy' comment but he'd been with the other girl and quickly intercepted by the headmaster. Those pictures in the paper had impressed her, here was a wizard who was powerful, wealthy and younger than her so should be easy to control.

She had been awaiting an opportunity to approach when she was beaten again, this time by the blond haired boy, only to be really impressed with the way Potter had dealt with it. His standing-up to the headmaster once more had the veela running Lady Fleur Potter through her brain, only to discover they were sitting at the wrong table as he was apparently in dispute with this house over mistreatment of his friend.

Wealth, power, a title, integrity, loyalty and, with the correct handling, he could even be handsome, yes he would make a fine husband for her so the other girl was just going to have to prepare for a disappointment. Fleur ran her eyes over Hermione critically and didn't believe this girl would be any competition, she would be doing the poor girl a favour as she'd better get used to being dumped.

-oOoOo-

Ron was sitting in his bedroom at the Burrow unable to believe that both his parents and McGonagall had sided with Potter, was the whole world against him? It never entered his mind that he could be wrong and everyone else right. Somewhere inside Ronald Bilius

Weasley there might have been a decent young wizard trying to break out but his rage at the perceived injustices life had heaped upon him prevented that wizard from seeing daylight.

Case in point was his hand, it was his jealousy and temper combined that caused the injury, Poppy Pomfrey had worked wonders to give him a fully functioning hand but all Ron saw was the scars and blamed everyone but himself for them being there.

Now he had his mother on his case while his dad tried to scrape enough gold together to buy him a new wand and he'd been sent home for the night to 'reflect on his actions'. Ron knew within himself that he was ages away from being able to ask a girl to be his girlfriend, he had expected Hermione to be there patiently waiting on him when he finally plucked up the courage to ask her. The fact that someone else might beat him to it never crossed his mind, she was Hermione for Merlin's sake but that Harry would do this to him was just too much to take. His sense of betrayal had no basis anywhere other than in his own mind but that didn't matter to Ron, Lord Potter, the Tri-Wizard Champion had stolen his girl and not even his own family seemed to give a damn.

It wasn't as if Ron thought Hermione was beautiful or the love of his life, it was purely down to the fact she was the only girl in the castle that he was sure wouldn't say no if he asked her out, the thought of being rejected by a girl was not a thought he wished to dwell on.

Ron heard his name being shouted up the rickety stairwell by his mother and sighed, it was time for another 'try talk sense into Ron' session and his anger peaked. He'd just been hoping that his dad could scrounge up enough gold to buy him another new wand when Ron remembered his little sister now had a fortune, Potter had done wonderful job of turning his whole family against him.

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Peter felt a bit better delivering this news to his master, he couldn't see any down side to this so should hopefully escape punishment.

“Master the latest news from your servant indicates that Potter’s relationship with the old fool has reached such a state that he no longer trusts him and they now argue in public. There is also news that Snape is no longer in the castle, he hasn’t been seen since Sunday night.”

The dry chuckle eased some of Peter’s fears, his master in a good mood was still very dangerous but much preferable to him being in a bad one.

“So Potter finally stands up to the meddling old fool, it should make for an interesting year and will actually aid our plans. Do not have our agent search for Snape, he really is of no consequence and our plan takes priority over everything.”

Peter was just beginning to count his blessings when the curse hit, thankfully it was only for a few seconds, “That was just a small reminder in case you get the idea to try bringing me just the good news, remember I will find out and then you will suffer my wrath.”

Peter could only mutter, “Thank you master,” as he backed out the room, silently wondering if it really was a good idea for his master to get a new body and his strength back.

-oOoOo-

The Weasleys entered Diagon Alley to find it busier than usual, this was due to the lawyers serving writs up and down the alley, Flourish and Blott’s could no longer sell books with Harry’s name in them and whether it was cakes or tee shirts, they all had to go. The real fireworks though were reserved for The Daily Prophet and drew quite a crowd as it spilled onto the street. The editor was trying to incite public opinion for his cause, “This is trying to muzzle the press and control the media, the wizarding public won’t stand for it.”

Unfortunately for the editor, the goblins had hired the best, “And just what did you do with this freedom of the press, fabricated stories to sell papers. Today’s edition of the Quibbler is the first time Lord Potter has ever spoken to the press yet your paper reports stories with

quotes on an almost weekly basis. Hearsay, rumours and downright lies constantly appear as banner headlines, Lord Potter has taken this action to preserve his image but reserves the right to take further action on some of the stories your paper has already printed. Our client is sick of people writing about his life as if they've been there, this is then sold to the public as the truth when it's nothing more than a pack of lies and a licence to mint money, that licence has been revoked!"

The editor was turning grey at the thought of having to stand behind some of the Potter stories they had printed in the past but tried not to let that show, "The Daily Prophet will not back down on this matter, check our paper tomorrow and read our response to this outrage."

"Rest assured that's exactly what Lord Potter pays us for, break that edict and you'll have no paper by the weekend."

Ron Weasley was raging, even a visit to Diagon Alley ended up about bloody Harry Potter.

-oOoOo-

Hermione was trying to talk through her tears but Sirius was relentless, having Harry and Remus here seemed to be bringing out the mischievous boy in him and she couldn't ever remember having laughed so much. "Sirius the whole point of this is to poke fun at people without being offensive."

"But what's the point of that, and anyway it's only Snivellus so how can we not be offensive, that git is a walking offensive target that we must hit at every opportunity. Ok how bout this, 'greasy stain removed from castle' surely there cant be anything wrong with that?"

Harry and Luna were holding on to each other as their laughter threatened to have them on the floor, Hermione was pretending to be serious but she loved seeing Harry laugh, she also suspected this was exactly why Sirius was doing it. "We're trying to keep the fact that Harry's involved in the greasy git no longer being able to access the castle a secret, while I personally think that's your best one yet I'm

afraid it's still a no." this would have been more effective if she didn't have a case of the giggles at Sirius's pretend pout.

"Ok but I'm determined to get one of my sayings onto these badges so even you won't be able to object to this one..."

The new Potter dwelling once again reverberate to the sound of laughter as the three teens were now holding on to each other as Hermione finally lost it and dissolved into laughter as well, breakfast in the great hall tomorrow was not one to be missed.

A/N Thanks for reading.

My next post will be Chapter 7 of FG2

Chapter 5

Harry, Hermione and Luna headed into the castle thinking they'd be early for breakfast and watch the fun, only to find out it had started before they even got there. Dobby and Winky had left a badge on every student's bedside table and it appeared most of them were already here and wearing them, they'd obviously come to the realisation this would cause a stir and got down early so they wouldn't miss the show. Their badges currently cycled between Support Cedric Diggory, Support Victor Krum, Support Fleur Delacour and Trust-Honour-Profit. They all hoped there would be more to come and Harry didn't intend to disappoint them.

The show for the moment was an enraged Dumbledore arguing with his three heads of house, much to the amusement of the students though the more astute amongst them recognised that act two had just turned up, Dumbledore yelling "Potter!" clued everyone else in.

The three walked towards the staff table, "Good morning," was all Harry said.

"Are you responsible for these badges?"

Harry proudly answering "Yes" threw Dumbledore off track for a moment but he recovered well, "Would you kindly explain the meaning of them?"

"Oh they have all different messages on them, was there one in particular you wanted me to explain?"

McGonagall beat Albus to it, "I was wondering why your name doesn't appear along with the other champions?"

"I'm not really a champion professor, more a sort of social experiment the headmaster is conducting, the forth message is the code by which goblins conduct their lives."

Dumbledore was trying to regain control of the situation, his many years of experience allowed him to reign in his anger after the three

heads of house had very publicly disagreed with his decision, he couldn't lose his temper with Harry no matter the provocation. "I would like you to explain why you made them in the first place."

"Well after Malfoy's dismal attempts were allowed yesterday I decided to take the idea and do it properly."

It was an angry Flitwick who now butted in, "Precisely the point we were making to the headmaster before you arrived, he took no action yesterday therefore we were questioning his decision to have them confiscated today."

"Oh that's an easy one Professor Flitwick, our potions professor can no longer gain entry into the castle so the headmaster is just deputising for him, Malfoy gets house points while my badges are confiscated, normal service has been resumed." Harry's badge then proclaimed 'Severus Ceases Slytherin' and all the other badges in the school switched to the same message, generating cheering throughout three quarters of the great hall.

Dumbledore proclaimed loudly, "Professor Snape is still head of Slytherin!"

Hermione was on him in a flash, "I'm sorry headmaster but it clearly states in 'Hogwarts a History' that all heads of house must reside in the castle during term, not even being able to enter the castle must surely call into question Professor Snape's ability to teach potions, far less be head of Slytherin house. How is he going to manage taking points from Gryffindor's while residing in Hogsmead?"

"This is a temporary situation Miss Granger and none of your concern."

"Ah but headmaster what if it isn't temporary, and I had a question I so wanted to ask him!" Dumbledore saw the gleam in Harry's eyes and wasn't biting but McGonagall was quite happy to play the straight woman. After hearing what was actually on Malfoy's badges she was livid but the little snake had got rid of the evidence by the time she

caught up with him, and anyway she was enjoying watching Albus squirm.

“What was it you wanted to ask Professor Snape Harry?”

“Oh I just wanted to know how he does that cool billowing robe thing yet his hair never moves a millimetre.” Minerva was struggling not to laugh when all the badges in the hall suddenly proclaimed ‘I Hate Fudge!’

“Harry you’ve overstepped the mark now, I cannot have the students of Hogwarts walking around with badges insulting the minister of magic; you leave me no choice but to confiscate them.”

“Minister of magic? Oh I think you may have misunderstood headmaster, fudge is a muggle confection that’s sickly sweet and makes me want to vomit!” Harry removed a box from his bag and handed it to Dumbledore while Luna and Hermione dropped a few boxes on each house table. Minerva had trouble maintaining her trademark scowl at the picture of a highland cow on the box with ‘fudge’ written across it.

“There is also a nutty version and the one full of rum is particularly disgusting.” The sniggering in the hall wasn’t confined to just the students, quite a few of the staff were now finding the whole situation highly amusing.

Harry had made his point, “I now see how this could be misconstrued and will change it at once!” the badges now read ‘Hogwarts isn’t safe’

“How can you say that Harry?” Dumbledore actually looked hurt.

“Well the last three Defence Professors have all tried to kill me while the current holder of the post used an unforgivable Imperius curse on every member of the class, why don’t you just hit me with a Cruciatus and then I’ll have the full set!”

Apparently the three heads of house only thought they were angry before, this was now the real thing as they screamed at Dumbledore.

“You said he was only going to demonstrate them on a spider!”

“You allowed that vile curse to be cast on children in our care?”

“I’ll be contacting the DMLE, even you have to obey the law Albus!”

Harry could have stood and watched this all day but it was now payback time, he tapped his badge again and the entire student population began roaring with laughter as their badges now displayed the question, ‘Is Malfoy Gay’, distracting the senior staff from their berating of Dumbledore for a moment.

Draco was screeching like a girl, “Potter I’m not gay!”

“Malfoy you have no idea how pleased I am to hear you say that, you, and those two strapping lads who’re always by your side, have been following me around since first year, I was beginning to get worried.” He put his arm around Hermione and spoke in a voice that clearly carried to every corner of the hall, “There dear, told you we had nothing to be concerned about, just because he spends more time on his appearance than Lavender doesn’t mean he’s gay.” A shout from the Gryffindor table had Harry offering a mock apology, “No offence intended Lavender, on you it looks good, on Draco it’s just too weird.”

The blond Slytherin glanced round at his house table to see them all laughing at him as Crabbe and Goyle tried to subtly back away from their leader, since subtly wasn’t exactly the two behemoth’s strong suit, it was blindingly obvious what they were attempting to do, and funny as hell.

Draco was desperate to go for his wand but here, in front of everyone with no Snape to back him up, he recognised the hopelessness of the situation. He’d tried to pull something off yesterday and failed miserably only to have the same scheme run against himself today with blinding success, that a quintessentially Slytherin move could be pulled off by a Gryffindor against him ended any hope of Draco ever running his house.

Albus may have had his hands full trying to placate three heads of house but Dumbledore was taking a wider view of Harry's actions and thought it was an exceedingly cunning plan, quite brilliantly executed. He sucked all the senior staff into a confrontation then beautifully destroyed Malfoy's credibility without casting a spell or saying anything that could get him into trouble, Salazar himself would have been proud of that one.

Harry, Hermione and Luna now sat at the Gryffindor table to a hero's welcome, though Ron looked desperate to laugh at Malfoy's demise but wouldn't because of who had brought it about.

Breakfast progressed normally though the silence coming from the staff table could only have been achieved by charms, McGonagall appeared ready to rip Dumbledore's beard out by its roots.

Harry was approached by a pair of red headed twins, "Doesn't your heart just fill with pride when your little prodigy stands on his own two feet George?"

"Just thinking we taught him everything he knows makes me all tingly inside Fred."

"If either of you two even think about dropping Hermione's name in there somewhere then I withdraw this offer," he touched their badges, both of which now advertised 'Coming Soon – WWW'

"Harry please don't joke about something like that, it's just too painful right now."

"Yeah Ludo Bagman has a lot to answer for."

"Guys I may mess with your heads occasionally but never with your dreams, come see me at the end of the week and we'll talk about it, I think you're worth investing in."

Both quickly agreed to the meeting but their conversation was interrupted by the arrival of the post owls, or more specifically the Daily Prophet carrying the banner headline:

Lord Who Must Not Be Named

Yesterday, in a move designed to prevent this newspaper from printing the truth, a writ was served on us that prevents pictures or the name of a certain wizard appearing in this paper. Lord Rotter will now be referred to by the pseudonym of The Lord Who Must Not Be Named and his picture replaced by the one opposite.

The image opposite happened to be a sack of potatoes sitting on a broomstick, the hall seemed to be holding its collective breath awaiting Harry's reaction. The play on words was making a direct link between him and another lord, he who must not be named! The sack of potatoes on a broom was also a direct insult to his flying skills.

Harry's reaction though was not what everyone expected, it started with a chuckle and built up to a full belly laugh, "And here was me thinking they were just a bunch of hacks, they must actually have some journalists working there. I love this, do you think I could get a framed, signed copy?"

"Are you sure you're alright Harry?"

"Luna I've never been better! Think about it, while the Prophet is coining stupid names and even stupider images for me, the Quibbler is about to blow the wizarding world's mind. The Prophet is too scared to print anything other than a stupid made-up name for Voldemort while your father will be asking questions the ministry can't answer, the Quibbler will be outselling the Prophet by Christmas, especially if we do an exclusive on Tom Marvolo Riddle."

Luna was beaming with pride and happiness, and that was before Harry pulled his last prank of the morning, "This one's for you Luna," as he touched her badge.

‘Bullying is Stupid’ appeared on her badge and every single one worn by members of Ravenclaw house, on seeing this Luna burst into tears and buried her head in Harry’s chest.

Harry had his arms sportingly around her, “Luna I’m sorry, I never meant to hurt you, I would never hurt you.”

Luna’s tear stained face looked up at him with wonder in her eyes, “You didn’t hurt me Harry, I’m just so grateful to you for doing this, no one’s ever stood up for me before.”

Harry pushed the girl’s blond hair away from her face and behind her ear, “You’ve got us now Luna, we always look after our friends.”

A smiling Hermione was standing beside her now, “That’s right Luna so let’s go and freshen up, meet us there Harry?”

He nodded as both girls made their way past a sheepish looking Ravenclaw house, Harry and Neville left right behind them.

Fleur had watched the morning’s proceedings with great interest, more convinced than ever that Lord Potter would be the perfect catch for her, she was well aware that over half the girls here had the same thought but then again, they weren’t Veela.

She’d sat at the Hufflepuff table this morning, much to the suspicion of its usual occupants and, while she ideally wanted Harry alone, this looked like the best opportunity she was going to get. Smoothing down her shortish skirt and loosening a few buttons on her blouse to show some cleavage, she was soon following the two boys, Fleur waited until leaving the hall before cranking up her veela charm.

Harry and Neville were standing waiting on the girls when he noticed his friend’s eyes appeared to glaze over, before he could comment on it there was a voice behind him, “Lord Potter?”

Harry turned to see the French girl, “Miss Delacour isn’t it?”

Fleur had her pose just right to display her assets, her voice dripping with sexual promise and that accent which seemed to turn the British

men's wills to jelly as all the blood rushed further south. "Please call me Fleur, I have been looking for a chance to apologise for my outburst at Halloween, we were all on edge and I didn't mean those words that I said, I hope you can forgive me?" she now had her hand on his bicep and her thumb was sensually rubbing his muscle in a circular motion, about twenty feet away Sir Cardigan was battering his head against the closest portrait frame in a futile attempt to escape from the canvas so he could worship at this perfect example of womanhood.

Harry appeared far more concerned with Neville's rapidly deteriorating condition than anything Fleur was doing, his friend now had drool dribbling down his chin. "Eh don't worry about it Miss Delacour, already forgotten."

Fleur couldn't understand why Harry wasn't putty in her hands by now, she literally pressed ahead, pushing her body into Harry as she ran her hand up and down his arm. "Oh Harry I was hoping we could become friends, good friends!"

Harry was paying her no attention whatsoever, "No problem, Nev mate what's the matter, speak to me Nev!" he looked around panicky, searching for help when his eyes settled on his betrothed and his whole face lit up in relief, "Hermione I am so glad to see you, I need some help here please."

Hermione had come out the toilet to see that French trollop draped all over Harry, every one of her insecurities went into hyper-drive with the thought of how could Harry possibly want a bushy haired, bucked toothed bookworm when he could have this girl being top of the list. His expression upon seeing her, followed by his words rocked her world!

She was over there in a flash and Miss 'I'll whisper in my French accent and feel-up your betrothed while you're standing watching' Delacour found herself un-ceremonially dumped on her petite derriere as Hermione forcibly brushed the French champion aside to claim her wizard. With both hands behind his head she initiated a kiss that would curl his toes. Harry had no idea what he'd done to merit this

reward but had no intention of asking until later, as his arms encircled Hermione his last conscious thought was much, much later.

By the time they came up for air, Fleur was long gone and Neville was well on the road to recovery, Luna though had a fit of the giggles at her friend's actions, "Hermione are you sure you are not part veela? Harry's condition now resembles Neville's from earlier."

Harry was wearing a smile he thought nothing would shift, that was just tempting fate, "Luna, my Hermione is one hundred percent witch, she doesn't need anything else to charm me."

'But how were you able to resist while Neville was a gibbering idiot from only getting the periphery effects as she focused her veela abilities on you?"

"Our rings protected me from that effect, leaving her just the same as all the others, unable to compete with the lovely Miss Granger."

Hermione almost grabbed him again but they would have been late for Charms, the three Gryffindors headed in that direction as Luna set off for the greenhouses and Herbology.

Filius was still raging at Albus and swore this wasn't over yet, he was far too professional an educator though to let this affect his performance in class, the lesson was progressing as planned until Mr Potter abruptly stood, "Luna's in trouble! Sir we need you to come with us." The lad must have made a portkey out of his open book because, as he and Miss Granger thrust it into his chest, Filius felt the accustomed hook behind his navel effect as all three disappeared.

-oOoOo-

As usual Luna was at the end as the class made its way back into the castle but today she didn't mind in the slightest, she was so happy that she was skipping rather than walking. That all changed as multiple hands gabbed her and she swiftly found herself dragged into a nearby boy's toilet, even though she was now held securely by

Crabbe and Goyle, Luna was unsure if she could have moved anyway as her body seemed frozen with fear.

“Well Miss Lovegood, you are going to receive the honour of reporting back to your friend Potter with first hand experience that I’m definitely not gay.” Draco ran his hand down her cheek before reaching to start unbuttoning her top, “You are actually quite pretty and a pureblood, who knows we might even make this a regular thing...”

Luna was in denial, thinking this couldn’t be happening to her until she felt the bastards hands start to loosen her buttons, she began to struggle and was suddenly free as Malfoy went crashing into the opposite wall while both captors either side of her were now unconscious on the floor. “Luna?”

Standing there was Harry, Hermione and Professor Flitwick, all with drawn wands and murder in their eyes, she sprang at Harry as the realisation of what was about to happen hit home. The sobbing and shaking blond girl found herself cocooned in an embrace with her two friends, Hermione was whispering reassuring words in her ear but it was Harry who brought her back to reality.

“I told you this morning, you’ve got us now Luna, we always look after our friends!”

Filius watched the scene as his mind raced with the facts he had amassed, Harry made a portkey, one that worked inside Hogwarts and delivered them straight to Miss Lovegood, though he had no apparent way of knowing where she was, far less that she needed urgent assistance. Harry had blasted Malfoy into the wall without uttering a spell while he and Miss Granger had stunned the bookends, freeing the girl from their grasp. “Miss Lovegood should visit Madam Pomfrey to check she’s ok.”

Both felt Luna start to violently shake again, making Harry’s mind up, “Professor, Luna is in my care and we will be returning to our accommodation, I trust you will deal with the garbage?”

Filius could see the calming effect Harry's words had on the girl so didn't object, she was uninjured though he hated to think of what would have happened had they not arrived when they did.

Harry's hands gently fastened the one button the piece of filth had managed to loosen before they got here, "They'll never get near you again Luna, let's go home."

Hermione released Luna and then kicked the unconscious Malfoy as hard as she could in the groin, "Sorry Professor, my foot slipped." They portkeyed out leaving the little professor wondering if Miss Granger perhaps had the right idea and internally debated whether he should kick the little rapist bastard as well.

-oOoOo-

It was a distraught Xeno Lovegood who arrived with Winky at their accommodation to find his daughter wedged between Harry and Hermione while sipping tea, "Oh love, are you alright, I'll kill those bastards if I ever get my hands on them." Remus and Sirius appeared to agree wholeheartedly with those sentiments and were more than willing to render Xeno assistance in this endeavour.

Luna found herself comforting her father, "Dad I'm fine, Draco loosened one button before Harry blasted him into a wall, Hermione then made sure he wouldn't be bothering anyone again for a very long time, if ever! I actually heard a crunch as her foot connected with his equipment, she may have just ended the Malfoy line!"

Xeno was hugging his daughter while his expression towards Harry and Hermione conveyed his eternal gratitude more clearly than words ever could, there are simply not enough words in any language to communicate a father's feelings towards the people who saved his little girl from being forcibly violated.

Luna's tea had contained a mild calming draft so she was able to convey the entire morning to her father, she had just finished when an irate Dobby informed them that there were aurors at the door demanding Harry surrender himself for the attempted murder of Draco Malfoy.

The sense of disbelief was total, until Hermione's anger broke the stunned silence, "Tell them to piss off Dobby."

Before anyone could contradict her, the now grinning elf popped off to complete his assigned task, he returned a minute later, accompanied by Barchoke.

"Filius floo-called me and I can honestly say I've never seen him angrier, it would appear that young Mr Malfoy has multiple broken bones combined with internal injuries and a crushed groin, he must have hit that wall with considerable force."

"Not hard enough," grumbled Xeno.

"The three pure bloods are claiming after you publicly humiliated Malfoy this morning, Miss Lovegood was used as bait to entice them into that toilet where they were violently ambushed. It's also claimed Professor Flitwick was confounded by you to see what you wanted him to see."

Harry was livid, "It's the same shit his godfather Snape spouted at the summer that was going to see Sirius get kissed, the bastards probably think it worked before so why not again!"

"The incident is being portrayed as three well respected pureblood wizards being victimised by a half blood with delusions of grandeur and his muggle born girlfriend, the hapless Lovegood girl being nothing more than an unwitting accomplice."

"What's Dumbledore doing about this," Sirius asked.

Barchoke's answer surprised them, "Absolutely nothing, our best guess is that he's waiting for Harry to be in deep trouble then come to his rescue, citing that only by you being made his legal ward will he be able to oversee you properly. At the moment you're all perfectly safe as this is considered goblin soil, they cannot enter without being invited and I also brought another twenty guards in case they considered just the two you had an invitation. No one but Harry can

make portkeys that pass through the wards with Dobby and Winky the only elves granted access, anyone else has to come through the front door.”

Hermione gasped, “Harry, my mum and dad, we need to contact them right away.”

It was Luna who explained the situation to the confused adults, “Harry made them portkeys and Dumbledore has already cast a spell on her dad, do you think he would hesitate to repeat that crime to get in here?”

“Wait, we may have the answer,” Sirius bounded off his seat and raced up the stair, returning a minute later and handing Harry a small wrapped parcel, “Barchoke kindly got these out my vault, they belonged to your father and me, I was going to give you his then we could always talk to each other.”

The parcel contained two mirrors, about five inches by three inches, Sirius took one and called for Dobby, “Give this to one of Hermione’s parents when they’re alone and tell them to say ‘Harry Potter’ into the mirror.”

It was less than five minutes later that Harry felt the mirror vibrate in his hand, Sirius instructed him to say ‘accept’ and Emma Granger’s face appeared in the mirror.

“Harry, How is this possible, is everything alright?”

“Everyone’s fine Emma, I’ll hand you over to Hermione and she’ll explain it.”

As Hermione was talking to her mother, Sirius couldn’t resist a jibe at his godson, “Emma? On first name terms already Harry, you don’t half work fast with the ladies.”

“Just my natural charm Sirius, something you obviously know nothing about!” this cracked Remus up.

“So you want us to return the portkey things love?” asked Emma after hearing the story and asking at least half a dozen times if Hermione was sure she was alright.

“No mum, I want you and dad to come straight here as soon as you finish work, do not go home just say your pass code and the portkey will bring you here, Dobby can fetch anything you need from the house. Even without portkeys they might try and use both of you to force Harry and me to come out.”

Emma had to go as she had a couple of patients to treat then they would be along to see her, with a ‘mirror off’ they hung-up and went back to discussing how they were going to handle this situation.

It was less than ten minutes later though when the Grangers appeared, still in their dentist garb, and holding hands. “Hermione some men turned up and said you were in trouble, they demanded that we go with them immediately. Your father took my hand and activated his portkey ring to get both of us out of there.”

Harry chuckled, “Oh I wish I could have seen there faces as Mr Granger shouted ‘pureblood bigots’ at them before disappearing.”

Dan was also chuckling, “If were going to be staying here you should call me Dan, it also might help if you told everyone that was my activation code, it had to be something I wouldn’t say by mistake.”

Hermione handled the introductions, her parents had no trouble believing Sirius was innocent after their own treatment by wizards in the last few days. With the elves providing more refreshments the Grangers joined the brainstorming session but Sal was now hissing so loud everyone could hear it.

“What’s he saying Harry?” Hermione asked.

“Both rings want me to take control of Hogwarts and force the situation to conclusion, it’s not that I disagree with them I just want to ensure the decision is mine. We need to see what our options are but I can’t really see any alternatives, does anyone disagree that Lucius

Malfoy has the minister in his pocket and with Dumbledore playing his own game only in Hogwarts will we be safe. The showdown is coming and at the moment we can dictate the place and time, I think this is what we need to do.”

Luna had an idea, “Daddy, when will the issue about Sirius be ready?”

Xeno guessed what his daughter was thinking, “If I could get some help I could have it ready for the morning...”

“I don’t want Luna leaving here!” Harry butted in, “She was in danger because she’s our friend, I think she should stay here for now.”

“Harry that could have happened to me at any time and who would have believed loony Lovegood, instead I had friends rescue me and kick their arses, well Hermione kicked some other bits but you get the picture. This isn’t your fault Harry, Draco is an animal who’s been taught all his life that whatever he wants is his for the taking, with no consequences to be paid because he’s a Malfoy. You humiliated him this morning and his father will be using this to protect the Malfoy name, even he must see how much of a prick Draco is but he’s a Malfoy so the wizarding world has to be made to respect him, that’s what this is all about.”

“Ok so we need to take down Malfoy Snr and Jr, Dumbledore with all those titles and probably the minister as well, any ideas?” Harry was smiling until Sal started hissing at him, “Sal says I should definitely have been a Slytherin with ambition like that but reckons I’ll need Gryffindor’s courage to pull it off!”

Remus offered to help Xeno and Barchoke insisted on providing a dozen goblin guards to ensure they were not disturbed in their work, that article should give Fudge something else to think about.

“Now the best way to get everyone where we want them is to tell them where I’ll be, Dobby what’s the situation like outside?”

“Only one step away from a battle, the aurors are being put under pressure to arrest you and Miss Moine.”

“Tell them we will both be at breakfast in the great hall tomorrow, that should ease the tension a bit.” A lot of people tried to say something but Harry held up his hand, “This is going to happen so let’s do it where there are lots of witnesses and Hermione and I are protected. They will try and ambush us before we get there but only McGonagall, and now Flitwick know we can portkey into the castle. With a bit of luck most of their forces will be trapped outside and then the castle will deny them entry.”

Dobby informed the Grangers that he had fetched clothes from their home for them before popping off to deliver his message, Remus and Xeno left to work on the Quibbler while Barchoke went to arrange guards for the pair, and the Grangers agreed to meet Sirius in the library after they had changed leaving the three teens to talk amongst themselves.

“I can’t thank you both enough for what you did today but I still want to be there with you tomorrow as well, I am being depicted as a stupid girl who doesn’t know right from wrong, I need to be there tomorrow so I can lay loony to rest once and for all.”

“Luna it will be very dangerous, Hermione and I are protected but you are not, we don’t know who will be there or how they’ll react and are counting heavily on Hogwarts help.”

“Harry I suspect that hall will be full tomorrow so they won’t start firing off curses, Dumbledore and the staff would be forced to act, I’ll be in as much danger as the rest of the students, probably less as I don’t intend moving more than a few inches away from you two.”

Hermione hesitatingly asked, “Harry, could Luna get a ring that protects her as well?” she knew she’d asked the wrong thing as he couldn’t hide the hurt in his eyes.

“That ring only offers protection because of the way I feel about you Hermione, without that it’s just another ring and I’m sorry Luna but I just don’t feel that way about you, you’re my friend.”

Luna kissed him on the cheek, “Harry I’m very happy with that, but I’m still going to be by your side tomorrow.” She left as they both clearly needed to talk.

“When this is all over you can give me the ring back if you want, I know I sprung the whole situation on you and will understand.”

“Harry I’m sorry, I got so entangled in Luna’s safety I wasn’t thinking for a moment there, but listen very carefully because I have no intention of repeating myself. The only way you’re getting this ring back is when you replace it with an engagement ring, understand?” knowing that with Harry, actions always spoke louder than words she proceeded to reinforce that message by kissing him senseless, ignoring the fact that her parents and Sirius were in their home, sometimes you just had to go with your feelings.

-oOoOo-

Albus sat in his office and thought he was in a no-lose position here, should Harry find himself in serious trouble he had the legislation in place to have his Lordship revoked and the lad placed in his care, he had no intention of pulling any strings to rescue Miss Granger from her fate.

In the unlikely event of Harry somehow escaping the situation he could claim that his hands were tied as Lucius Malfoy controlled the minister, Albus tried not to think about that outcome too much as that achievement would place the boy almost out with his grasp.

No, Albus focused on the positive, sure that by this time tomorrow night Harry would be once more ensconced in Gryffindor tower, preferably without Miss Granger and free from all outside influence. Once more his was the only voice Harry would be listening to.

The old wizard was so wrapped up in his own plots he couldn't taste the aroma of revolution that was in the air, and Hogwarts had no intention of informing the old git of what was brewing.

When Harry had asked Dobby to 'tell them' the little elf had outdone himself, he took 'them' to mean McGonagall, Flitwick, Sprout, Ginny and the twins, Neville, Susan, Hannah, Cedric, Tracy and Daphne before informing the aurors. There were heated meetings throughout the castle that Hogwarts herself was making sure the headmaster knew nothing about.

Staffroom:

Filius was incensed, "If they arrest those children tomorrow for saving Miss Lovegood from being raped then this will be my last night in this castle, when the Malfoy's rule Britain then it's time for me to leave."

Septima Vector wasn't so sure, "Can you say for definite that the girl was about to be raped Filius?"

"Well Septima, Crabbe and Goyle were holding the struggling girl by the arms as Malfoy was loosening her clothing while promising to make this a regular occurrence before Potter blasted him. If you can offer another explanation for those circumstances then I for one am willing to listen. There is not one shred of doubt in my mind that I participated in a rescue mission today."

Flitwick's description hardened everyone's attitude, though some like McGonagall didn't need it, "I have already written my letter of resignation and, should my Gryffindors be arrested for saving their friend, I will ram it right down the old bastard's throat!"

Pomona nodded in agreement, "As long as you leave room in there for mine Minerva, that boy has saved the school twice while Albus sat on his bony arse and is now going to be abandoned to his fate because he had the audacity to stop that little shit Draco from raping a young girl. I will not be party to that!"

Gryffindor common room:

Ron sat in a corner while the other three members of his family and all his year mates whipped the entire house up into a frenzy, in some part of his brain he recognised that he should be up there leading the whole thing as the evil Slytherin scum tried to escape their punishment by blaming two heroic Gryffindors. The same part of his mind screamed at him that, but for his stupid jealousy he would have been standing beside them today as they took care of the aforementioned scum.

Neither Harry nor Hermione had even looked in his direction before disappearing with Flitwick to save Luna, that he had missed a chance to play the hero hurt Ron more than any punishment meted out by McGonagall or his mum could. The realisation that without Potter, Ron was just a no-friend nonentity was a bitter potion to swallow, he may have been in Potter's shadow but even shadows got to be in the light occasionally.

The decision that Gryffindor house would stand with two of their own was never in any doubt, if they wanted to take them from the great hall they would soon discover that Harry and Hermione had every wand in Gryffindor guarding their backs.

Hufflepuff common room:

Puffs were notorious for their level headed thinking and being slow to anger, earning them the unjust title of plodders. There was nothing plodding about the passion being displayed at the moment as Susan Bones rallied the house, "We can't allow this to proceed unchallenged, it's time for this house to stand up and be counted and I can't think of a more important issue than this. Not only must we protest the arrest of the innocents but if Malfoy gets away with this there will not be a girl in the castle who's safe. This place is dangerous enough without removing its protector and unleashing the Slytherins to pick us off one at a time."

Hufflepuffs decision was finalised when Cedric stood and proclaimed, "I stand with Harry!"

Ravenclaw common room:

Although not contacted directly, the fact that Harry and Hermione would be turning up tomorrow at breakfast spread through the school quicker than a dose of dragon pox, Roger Davies was one angry Ravenclaw as he ranted and raved at his housemates.

“Today I was embarrassed to be a Ravenclaw, walking around the school with a badge declaring ‘Bullying is Stupid’ and then find out one of our own had to be saved by a couple of Gryffindors – again!”

“She’s not one of us, loony left remember.”

“Shut-up Cho, if anyone deserves kicked out of Ravenclaw it’s you and your clique, my young sister starts here next year and now faces being bullied in her dorm with raped in the hallways as an added attraction if that little shit Malfoy gets away with this. What are these badges going to proclaim tomorrow, Ravenclaw’s are cowards? I for one am going to stand for what’s right, I stand with Harry Potter!”

There was never going to be total agreement but well over half declared their intention to follow Roger’s lead.

Slytherin forth year girl’s dorm:

“So we’re agreed, this can’t be allowed to happen, if Draco gets away with this we would be next,” said Tracy.

Millicent partially agreed with that assessment, “Well you and Daphne would be, I am probably destined to be Crabbe and Goyle’s plaything, not a future I had envisioned for myself.”

Daphne shuddered with revulsion, “Even the thought of any of them touching my body makes me want to vomit, what can we do about it though?”

“We can see how many Slytherin girls agree with us, let’s split up and canvas the other year groups.” The other two agreed with Tracy and left to try and determine exactly where the female population of their house stood, a situation that would have been unthinkable even a few weeks ago.

Albus sat sipping his cocoa, so intensely focused on securing control of Harry again that he was totally oblivious to the school rapidly slipping away from him.

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Dan Ganger lay awake in the luxurious bed with his wife snuggled in his arms, sleep would be a rare commodity tonight. His little princess was walking straight into the lions den tomorrow and there was nothing he could do about it, they themselves were now prisoners, confined here until this situation was resolved. The only reason he was not tearing his hair out in anguish was the young man who would be at her side, talking to Sirius had really opened their eyes towards Harry.

Sirius had been understandably emotional when he was describing how he was steeling himself to face death when the two kids had turned up to rescue him, this gave them even more insight into the bond between Harry and Hermione, though they could have done without the graphic description of what a Dementor was.

These kids had faced horrors they couldn't imagine, in the case of Dementors they couldn't even bloody see! Dan felt the dampness seep through his pyjama top where his wife's silent tears soaked into the material, all he could do was hold her tighter and pray that the castle's protection would be enough. He had no words of comfort for her, meaningless platitudes didn't work with the Granger woman and in this situation he had nothing else. For at least the millionth time he wondered what would have happened had he obeyed his first instinct and told that strange woman called McGonagall to piss off four years ago!

A/N Thanks for reading.

My next post will be chapter 6 of 'Can't'

Chapter 6

It was quite a sombre group who sat at the breakfast table awaiting Hedwig's arrival with the latest Quibbler, they decided that would be their signal to leave for Hogwarts. The snowy owl was the only bird keyed to their accommodation as she swept in through a magical skylight to deliver these important papers to her wizard, holding her leg out to Harry as he relieved his familiar's burden. One look at the headline had Harry emitting a low whistle, "Luna your dad has done us proud, this is going to blow the wizarding world wide open, and make our task this morning so much easier."

Sirius Black Innocent – Cornelius Fudge Guilty!

Sirius Black, the man who spent eleven years in Azkaban without a trial or even being charged is innocent!

Our esteemed minister of magic meanwhile was heavily involved in Black's illegal incarceration while filling his pockets with death eater gold so his 'friends' could avoid trial. No crimes were considered too evil, they just cost more in bribes to cover up.

Unlike the ministry under Fudge's tenure this newspaper takes its responsibility to tell the truth seriously, and therefore has sent all of our evidence listed here to the head of the DMLE.

The case against the minister has been brought to our attention by an enraged goblin nation, angered by two specific events, their spokesperson had this to say:

"Goblins would normally not become involved in the affairs of wizards but events recently have left us without a choice, our champion and even our way of life have been put under threat by the latest ministrations by the minister and his associate, Lucius Malfoy.

Yesterday Lord Potter, his betrothed and Head of Ravenclaw House, Professor Filius Flitwick, aborted the attempted rape of a thirteen-year-old witch inside Hogwarts castle by the Malfoy heir and two of his friends. Instead of being hailed as heroes the minister has demanded Lord Potter and his betrothed's arrest for attacking a

Malfoy while claiming Professor Flitwick was confounded by these two wizarding teenagers. This travesty of justice cannot be allowed to continue for two reasons, as the headline proclaims Sirius Black is innocent yet still went to Azkaban, we will not allow this fate to befall our champion.

Secondly, and even more importantly, the idea that a couple of teenagers could confound someone of goblin decent is not only preposterous but insulting and very bad for business, would you trust your gold to Gringotts if a simple charm like that could undo the guardian of your fortune?

Goblins are immune to this charm and anyone attempting to cast it on a member of Gringotts will find themselves cleaning out our dragon pens deep in the catacombs.

Only this direct threat to our champion and goblin business empire have forced us to release the financial dealings of a corrupt minister of magic, every large deposit listed here ties directly to a person escaping trial or a piece of legislation forced through the Wizengamot. Printed in this newspaper are the secret and underhanded financial dealings of an unscrupulous man, we leave the rest up to the wizarding authorities.”

There then followed a list of quite substantial amounts deposited over a number of years, the last being yesterday as obvious payment for Draco’s cover-up and Harry’s arrest.

The amount of evidence for Sirius Black being innocent is in direct contrast to the total lack of any proof of his guilt, the real criminal is a very much alive Peter Pettigrew. This posthumous Order of Merlin winner has been living amongst us as an unregistered animagus, his form is rather ironically that of a rat who has actually had his picture printed on the front page of the Prophet! Pettigrew found himself confronted by Lord Potter and others this May in the infamous ‘shrieking shack,’ after having unrestricted access to Hogwarts for many years.

He was captured and confessed to his crimes before escaping as Lord Potter’s party was attacked by an army of Dementors the

minister had insisted be paced at a school. The same minister refused to believe anything other than Sirius Black was guilty and ordered the man who'd never even been given a trial kissed immediately.

Lord Potter had this to say:

“I was attacked by Dementors on the Hogwarts express, again during a Quidditch match and finally on Hogwarts grounds last term yet the minister maintained they were there for my safety? When we informed him that Sirius Black was innocent and Pettigrew alive, he claimed we were cofounded, apparently I'm the one now doing the confounding!

Since the ministry refuses to believe that Pettigrew is alive, and therefore won't search for him, I'm offering one hundred thousand galleons for his capture. This is no gimmick as the gold is already in a Gringotts vault with the key awaiting whoever hands the murder over to the goblins, for some reason I don't trust the ministry to deal with this.

If it takes parading Peter Pettigrew up and down the length of Diagon Alley for the entire wizarding world to realise the truth then that is what I will do, this appears to be the only way to prove my godfather's innocence.”

There was a picture of his rat form with the missing toe but also one featuring a very much alive Peter from the shrieking shack, Harry wondered how Xeno got hold of until Luna offered an explanation, “My father has a pensieve which he can take pictures in, that must be Professor Lupin's memory.”

Hermione couldn't contain her glee, “Barchoke has also done us proud, this could finish Fudge and hurt Malfoy by association, and you know most of that gold had to come out of the Malfoy vault.”

Harry stood up from the table, “If this has just been delivered to the great hall then I think it's time for us to make an appearance.”

Hermione and Luna joined him before all three were grabbed by an emotional Emma Granger, she'd heard from Sirius that neither Harry nor Luna had a mother so engulfed the trio before kissing them on the cheek and extracting promises that they would be careful.

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Luna's prediction had proved accurate, the great hall was packed as all staff and every student, including the two visiting schools and their heads were all at breakfast when Cornelius Fudge had made his grand entrance. With Malfoy strutting by his side and ten aurors behind him the minister looked ridiculous when you considered they were here to arrest a fourteen-year-old boy.

Unbeknown to those in the hall Cornelius had almost the entire auror corps between Potter's dwelling and Hogwarts, he had no intention of letting the brat garner any sympathy by being dragged out the great hall with the entire school watching, Lucius wanted this done quickly and quietly, he had paid handsomely for that service and his job was to deliver it.

That idea disappeared like a puff of smoke in a hurricane when a flock of owls swept into the hall with the Quibbler, whose subscriptions had skyrocketed due to the Potter deal. Fudge was a political animal with finely tuned survival instincts that quickly picked up on the hostility starting to be radiated towards him, the headline almost had Cornelius vomiting in his green bowler hat before he screamed at the auror's present, "Go and arrest Potter now and don't take any shit from the goblins, we'll deal with this pack of lies later."

Dumbledore read the article as a state of dread began overtaking his body, if Harry's advisors could take down the minister, and possibly Malfoy with him, then Albus wouldn't have an earthly of regaining control of the boy. His gaze shifted towards the end of the Slytherin table where a theatrically bandaged Malfoy sat smirking with his two brainless buddies, it was quite noticeable that the rest of the house were trying to keep their distance from him with even Miss Parkinson sitting at the opposite end of the table. Albus also noticed a lot of activity amongst the students regarding those blasted badges but was too far away to read what they were saying now.

A couple of Ravenclaws had deciphered the charms used and quickly came up with a spell to alter them, since the only things that travelled faster than light were rumours, scandal or secrets inside Hogwarts everyone soon knew it. The older students were assisting the younger ones as the badges were now proclaiming 'I stand with Harry!'

It was into this atmosphere that the trio portkeyed directly into the great hall, and the headmaster nearly fell off his golden throne in shock.

Fudge was livid, "Potter how did you get in here? You're under arrest!"

"That's Lord Potter to you and I would advise you not to reach for your wand, though Malfoy here is welcome to fire as many curses at us as he wants."

"I will ruin you boy, and the rag that printed these lies!" Malfoy was desperate to go for his wand.

"Well we could always claim we were under the Imperius curse, then fill Cornelius's bowler hat with gold, after all it worked for you... WHAT THE FUCK ARE THEY DOING SITING THERE?" Harry had just caught sight of the three arseholes at the end of the Slytherin table, his 'question' was screamed at Dumbledore.

Albus shrugged his shoulders, "My hands are tied Harry, there's nothing I can do!"

"I think you'll find that was Luna's predicament," Harry pointed towards the enchanted ceiling and it began displaying the scene from yesterday, the entire hall watched on in horror as Luna was dragged into the toilet where Draco was waiting for her, while she struggled in vain to escape, he started to loosen the terrified girl's buttons as the mood inside the hall turned ugly. The cheering was deafening as Malfoy went flying off the 'screen' and Luna rushed into the arms of her rescuers.

“You must be so proud of your son Lucius, he really is a chip of the old block! Dumbledore you have let the students of Hogwarts down for the last time, your hands may be tied but mine aren’t.”

The gem counter for Slytherin house exploded, raining down semi-precious stones on the three stooges who sought shelter under the table. All Slytherin banners in the hall fell to the floor as trunks containing students belongings began to pile up at the doors. A massive crack started at Malfoy’s end of the house table and quickly raced along the enormous block of wood, splitting the table in half as Draco was again squealing like a little piglet.

“Hogwarts stop!” Harry shouted, “I will not have the entire house punished because of some individuals.” Every pair of eyes in the hall was now focused on him so it was time for the truth, “I am the Heir of Slytherin...” this was all he managed to say before being rudely interrupted.

Ron had watched this morning’s proceedings and was on the verge of admitting to himself he might have been wrong about how he treated his friends when the red mist descended once more, some things were unforgivable to the Gryffindor. “Potter you slimy Slytherin bastard, I took you into my home and now we’ll need to fumigate it!” Two red headed twins pounced on their brother and dragged him to the ground as an embarrassed Ginny tried to apologise.

“Sorry Harry, you and Hermione are always welcome at the Burrow, don’t listen to this arse!”

Harry nodded, “As I was saying, I am the Heir of Slytherin by conquest! I have defeated the half blood bastard Tom Marvolo Riddle three times – for the Ravenclaws amongst us it’s an anagram I’m sure you’ll work out. I thwarted him as a toddler, only a sick puppy could aim a killing curse at a baby – you ever try that Lucius? I defeated him again when he was growing out the back of Quirrell’s head, yes he taught here for a year thanks to our headmaster. The third time was in the chamber of secrets when a cursed diary was set on a first year by Lucius Malfoy so the minister sent Hagrid to

Azkaban. Anyone else seeing a pattern here, did you even get an apology Hagrid? ”

The large man’s “NO!” was more of a growl than anything else.

“Salazar Slytherin despises Riddle with unbridled passion for what he’s done to his once proud house, he took the noble pursuits of ambition and cunning, bastardising them to cheating, lying, stealing, blackmailing, torturing and killing anyone who didn’t agree with his views. Riddle believes that there is no good or evil, just power and those too weak to seize it! He told me this himself, just before I banished him for the second time. The house that bears his name has lost its honour and has until Christmas to regain it or Salazar will withdraw his support from Hogwarts all together, we’ve already been given a small taste of what that means.”

The Bloody Baron approached Harry and bowed, for the first time in living memory the ghost spoke, “Thank you my Lord, I long for the day when my house can actually achieve something on its own merits rather than by the belittlement of others, I knew Salazar and can understand his shame as I too have felt it.”

Harry’s ring hissed loud enough for those around him to hear, “Salazar thanks you Phillip and asks for your assistance in rebuilding his house, he also suggests you speak to Helena, a millennium is a long time for both of you to be carrying this pain around.”

The ghost’s bow was even deeper this time as the Slytherin banners returned to their previous position while the table and house points indicator repaired themselves. All but three of the trunks returned themselves to the Slytherin dorms, “To help facilitate this change of direction Severus Snape is no longer head of Slytherin and he, along with Malfoy, Crabbe and Goyle will never set foot in this castle again.”

The cheering was rapturous but Dumbledore was on his feet, trying to shout above the noise though eventually he needed a sonorous charm to achieve it, “Mr Potter I must object, I am headmaster here and you have no right to expel students or dismiss professors...”

Harry held his arm straight up and the sword of Gryffindor appeared in his hand, "I am the Heir of Slytherin by conquest but the Heir of Gryffindor by birth, the days of my enemies being allowed to wander freely around this castle ends now!" With that he drove the sword halfway into the floor of the hall and a flash spread out from the point of impact, the immediate consequences were that both Lucius Malfoy and Igor Karkaroff collapsed in agony, clutching their left forearms, somewhat surprisingly so did Professor Moody.

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Barchoke was outside the Potter accommodation module and preparing his troops for battle, the aurors were determined they were going to gain access while the goblin force had no intention of allowing that to happen whilst one of them still stood, a bloodbath looked imminent until the authoritative shout of "Aurors stand down!" saved many lives.

Amelia Bones came striding through and spoke to the auror in charge, "Dawlish, what in Merlin's name is going on here?"

"Madam Bones I was given a direct order from minister Fudge to gain access to this building and arrest Potter, those orders also included dealing with any goblin interference."

"You were about to lose me half my auror force and plunge us into a war with the goblin nation, all to arrest a fourteen-year-old boy who's only crime would appear to be that he's more popular than Fudge! I have a warrant for the minister's arrest on corruption charges so you just lost your protection, I hereby suspend auror Dawlish, without pay, until complaints filed against him have been properly investigated. You no longer have any business here so leave now, do not attempt to leave the country though."

Amelia walked calmly towards the goblins and spoke to who she reckoned was in charge, "I'm Amelia Bones, head of the DMLE, and I would like to apologise for what happened here this morning. We have no right to demand entry here no matter who gives the order, I

would like to speak with those inside and am quite prepared to surrender my wand if allowed access.”

Barchoke answered, “Madam Bones, you’re renowned amongst the goblins for your fairness but all I can do is submit your request, Dobby!”

The little elf appeared and answered the question before even being asked, “The three have already left for the great hall, only Miss Mione’s parents and the dog are here.”

“Could I speak to her parents, I understand two of Fudge’s lackeys went to their place of work and harassed them, I’m assuming they had been provided with emergency portkeys?”

Barchoke nodded before speaking to Dobby, “Please tell them we’ll be coming in Dobby and to keep that mutt under control.” The elf popped away to make sure it was Padfoot who greeted Madam Bones and not Sirius Black.

Amelia was very impressed by the interior but immediately spotted the apprehension from the two parents, “Mr and Mrs Granger I presume? Please accept my apology for those two goons who turned up at your work yesterday, you have my assurance none of your family are facing any charges whatsoever.”

Emma was in no mood to accept platitudes from this stranger, “What about Harry, or Dumbledore using spells on my husband? Is Luna going to see justice done or is this boy’s father going to be able to buy his way out of trouble again? All three of them are at present in that bloody castle and we’re going nuts here wondering what’s happening to them.”

“That is my next port of call where I am going to arrest Cornelius Fudge, Harry will get no trouble from me but Luna’s case has to be brought to my department by the school. Hogwarts actually pre-dates the ministry and wizarding law doesn’t always apply in the castle as it does everywhere else. I invite you to join me and on the way we can discuss what Dumbledore has been up to now.”

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Harry was certain the new wards would affect Lucius Malfoy because it prevented anyone with a dark mark entering the castle and caused great pain to any who managed to breach the defences. Karkaroff was a bit of a surprise but Moody was a total shock, Hermione as usual was first to formulate a solution. Knowing beforehand the wards Harry had erected were triggered by the dark mark, and that Professor Moody hated dark wizards with a vengeance, she summoned his ever present flask.

One sniff of the contents was all she needed to confirm her suspicions, "Its polyjuice Harry, whoever that is they're not Professor Moody."

Harry stunned both Malfoy and the imposter before addressing the Drumstrang students, "That ward Hogwarts just erected reacts to people carrying Riddle's dark mark, I need to stun your headmaster until we can get this sorted out." The last thing he wanted was a war with the best students of Drumstrang in the middle of the great hall.

After stunning Karkaroff, Harry whirled to face Dumbledore, "Did you know their headmaster was a death eater?" Albus didn't have to answer, it was all over his normally indecipherable face, Harry's temper was starting to get away from him. "So we have a visiting death eater headmaster, a death eater head of Slytherin, a death eater friend of the minister of magic and now a death eater impersonating our defence professor, why didn't you contact Pettigrew and Riddle and they could have had a reunion? Slaughter all the non-pureblood first year's for old time's sake or just to get back into the swing of things. These people maimed, raped and murdered but were given a slap on the wrist and told not to be a bad boy again, is it any wonder you have death eaters causing havoc at the world cup, you didn't deal with it last time and its coming back to bite you again."

Harry turned his attention to Fudge, "Was my godfather the only one to end up in Azkaban over this?"

Cornelius was hardly listening, he was too busy staring at the now stunned Malfoy who was still clutching his arm, that combined with the financial irregularities printed today would see both of them finished.

Dumbledore tried to wrestle back control of the morning, he'd felt the wards leave him when Harry drove the sword into the stone floor but bluffing was something that came naturally to the old man, "Harry you need to release these men now, this can all be dealt with by the proper authorities."

"Albus Dumbledore that is no concern of yours since you are no longer Headmaster of Hogwarts, both Salazar and Godric consider you to be the worst headmaster in the history of the school. The students inside this castle should always be the headmaster's main concern, you subjected them to years of bad teachers and repeatedly endangered every one of them because it suited your private agenda. For the greater good of wizarding Britain this can no longer be tolerated, the students in this hall are the future of our world and deserve the best, you may be a superb teacher and a great wizard but you're a shit headmaster."

Even the staff were shocked by this statement, they may have privately agreed with it but none of them ever had the stones to say it to Dumbledore's face.

"Professor McGonagall, would you consider becoming the new headmaster?"

Harry's request dragged Minerva back to reality, she could have sworn the lad had just told Albus he was a shit headmaster, and she'd wanted to do that for years. "Under what conditions would I be working Harry? If I had to defer every decision to you then I don't think it would work."

Harry displayed his first smile of the morning, "Straight to the point as usual professor, it's so refreshing after dealing with your predecessor. I want the best teachers possible in the classrooms, a fair and just discipline policy that applies equally to all students with a clearly

defined line that crossing gets you expelled. Those three over there are not your concern as they crossed way over the line before you were appointed and their punishment is to be expelled while being reported to the DMLE. I have no intention of trying to tell you how to do the job but Hogwarts has assured me she will offer you every assistance; the new improved wards are non-negotiable though."

"I would like to talk it over with you later but in principle I'll agree for now, would you have any objections to me retaining Dumbledore's services to teach potions?"

"As I have said ma'am, the professor was considered a superb teacher who, if I remember my chocolate frog cards correctly, was an alchemist of some renown that worked closely with Nicolas Flamel. Let's face it he's got to be an improvement on Snape, not head of Slytherin though."

Albus sat just that little bit straighter, he was still in the game. When the wards left him he knew his tenure as headmaster was over but thought he was going to be banished from the castle like Severus, this gave him opportunities to try and win his way back into Harry's trust.

It was this moment that the polyjuice effect ran out on Moody, revealing Barty Crouch Jr. to gasps of astonishment from the staff who knew him.

"Albus how is this possible, he's supposed to have died in Azkaban!" Minerva had her wand directed at the transformed death eater.

"I have no idea headmistress, like everyone else I thought he was dead."

"Can you people do nothing right?" Hermione's comment drew everyone's attention so she started counting them out on her fingers, "First we have our resident death eater Snape, then we had the chief death eater, the supposed dead Riddle teach here, thirdly Malfoy's diary attack released a basilisk and brought Riddle back into the

castle. Then we had the non death eater Sirius and the rat, supposedly deceased death eater Pettigrew. Now we have a headmaster whose a death eater and a professor whose not a professor but a dead and already buried death eater. This is meant to be a bloody school!”

While people contemplated Hermione’s rant, Hogwarts informed Harry there were visitors at the door, he allowed them access since the Grangers were with them.

Amelia’s attention was immediately drawn to the three prone figures as she entered the hall, her eyes did a double-take though as she focused on one of them. Her wand was in her hand before Amelia realised that she’s just made a mistake, she stopped moving and slowly turned her head from side to side, a sea of pointed wands greeted her.

She was about to start barking orders when she discovered that one of those wands belonged to her niece, Susan may have had tears in her eyes while pointing her wand at her but there was absolute determination there as well, Susan may not like what she was about to do but that wouldn’t stop her. “Susan?”

“I’m sorry auntie but we can’t let you take him, that could just as easily have been me in that toilet and I can only pray that he would come to my defence just as quickly, if you arrest Harry for this then no girl will be safe in this castle and no one else will lift a finger to help because they could end up in Azkaban.” Susan now had tears streaming down her face but her wand never wavered, Amelia had never been prouder of her niece.

“I am not here to arrest Harry Potter and commend you all for standing up, not only for your friend but for what is right. Could we please put the wands away though before we have an accident?” Susan rushed into her aunt’s arms, her tears were now ones of relief as Amelia comforted her distraught niece, it was bad enough to have to draw your wand on an auror but when it was your guardian as well it proved a bit too much for the young girl.

Harry was amazed and humbled by the show of support, even half of the Slytherins had stood in support of him, or at least against Malfoy. Hermione and Luna headed towards her relieved parents while Harry found himself joined by a black dog and Barchoke, Harry thought this was a prank worth of a marauder, the most wanted man in Britain to be led into the great hall by the head of the DMLE. That was until Padfoot took it to a whole new level by lifting his leg and pissing on the unconscious Malfoy, the Grangers physically had to hold both girls up as they were almost involuntary repeating said act due to the fact they were laughing uncontrollably. Sal's comment that this was revenge worthy of a Slytherin was not lost on Harry, he only kept himself together by imagining how distraught Moony would be at missing this.

Amelia was now by his side, "Lord Potter it would appear your dog is not housebroken." The humour in her voice was unmistakable.

Harry was still trying to hold it together as the big dog was now looking right into his face, the laughter in its eyes unmistakable, "He normally does his business on the compost heap, he obviously recognised Lucius here as garbage. Do you have any truth serum on you Madam Bones?"

Amelia glanced towards Albus before Harry interrupted her, "Professor Dumbledore is no longer in charge here, in matters of Hogwarts safety the school takes precedent over ministry laws. I am a duel founder's heir and want to know why we have three death eaters in the great hall, I am allowed to question them on activities relating to the school." Both fabled rings were now clearly visible on Harry's fingers, cementing his claim.

A shocked Amelia Bones was falling over herself in an attempt to get some serum there as quickly as possible, it was one of her greatest wishes to get three drops of that into Malfoy so her elf was back in seconds with phials of the restricted potion.

Harry was again speaking to the students of Drumstrang, "My intention is to ask your headmaster if he put my name in the cup and if he has any objectives here other than seeing Victor winning the tri-wizard tournament. I expect the answer to both of those questions to

be no at which point I will release him and quickly provide his exit from the castle, unfortunately never to return. I would like to ensure Drumstrang that this move is purely for the safety of those in the castle and unmarked staff and students will always be welcome in Hogwarts.”

He dealt with Karkaroff first, figuring to get it over and refine their procedure, he was placed in a chair in front of the great hall before being revived, the veritaserum helped with the pain and two quick ‘no’s’ later Harry handed the wizard a spoon from the table that he’d turned into a portkey, the Drumstrang headmaster left the hall to appear pain-free outside Hagrid’s hut. Now it was time for Lucius Malfoy.

Lucius awoke to find himself bound to a chair with the sleeve of his robe missing, displaying his painful dark mark for everyone to see. He looked towards Fudge for help and quickly realised the bastard was trying to turn this whole thing around in the hope of saving his own worthless arse.

Amelia was taking her time, savouring the moment as well as the pain clearly etched on this bastard’s face. Malfoy thought he was untouchable but was sitting here at her mercy, all she needed was enough to get the same position in front of the Wizengamot and she would be one seriously happy witch, she applied the three drops required to make Malfoy tell the truth.

Harry’s first question almost granted her wish but by the end Malfoy was done for, she wanted to jump up and down like a teen at a Quidditch match whose team had just won the world cup, outside she may have been calm and business like but inside all she could think was ‘Gotcha you murdering bastard!’

“Why are you in Hogwarts today?”

Malfoy’s voice was devoid of emotion as the potion compelled him to speak the truth, “I bribed the minister to save Draco, the stupid arse can’t even rape someone without getting caught, I came to make sure the job was done properly with Potter and his mudblood arrested for daring to interfere!”

“Did you plan that the basilisk would be let loose in Hogwarts?”

“Yes”

The reek of dog pish wafting from Malfoy was probably the only thing stopping Harry from pouncing on the ponce and punching his face in. “Why?”

“I had two goals, to rid Hogwarts of the filth polluting it and discredit that disgrace Weasley.”

Harry wanted there to be no ambiguity whatsoever, this slippery bastard was going down. “How were you going to end the pollution at Hogwarts?”

Malfoy condemned himself with his own words, “By killing all the mudbloods and half bloods, thus purifying the castle!”

The sword of Gryffindor shot out the floor and straight into Harry’s hand, “Getting rid of the filth from Hogwarts is my job, that’s why there will be no more Malfoy’s in the castle – EVER!” Harry glowed brightly signifying the castle agreed with him and the decree had been passed, though it still hadn’t been established if Hermione’s actions yesterday left any ability for there to BE any more Malfoys.

“Madam Bones, please tell me you have enough to put this bastard in Azkaban, otherwise I’m going to kill him right here and now! After seeing the beast everyone here now understands just what damage it could have done.”

“Lord Potter, Gringotts doesn’t contain enough gold to buy his way out of this one. Over half the Wizengamot had relations at Hogwarts during that fiasco, the whole incident will be investigated including innocent people being shipped to Azkaban while this piece of filth strutted about as if he owned the place.”

Harry still had his sword in hand when he had an idea, “Sir Nicolas?”

The Gryffindor ghost floated over, "I know what your greatest wish is my friend, this is a magical sword I have in my hand, would you like me to make the attempt?"

Nick quickly grabbed his hair and pulled until the remaining piece of sinew was stretched taut, after all the worse that could happen was his head would be cut off.

Harry carefully placed the blade against the attached piece of Nick's neck and it parted at once, Nick was pulling it so tight though that his released head shot out his grip and travelled across the hall. His laughter plus the sight of his now headless body with its arms out in front of it, staggering about brought some light relief to the morning.

"Oh thank you my boy, that half-inch has ruined my death, I can't wait to give Sir Patrick my head though it's going to take a bit of getting used to first."

Not for the first time the great hall was interrupted by Peeves, but this was a different poltergeist, "Oh wee Potty, Peeves promises to be good, don't use nasty sword on poor wee peevesy, I will be a good poltergeist, Peeves promises!"

Harry was laughing now, "Peeves don't go making promises you can't keep, stop picking on the first years and you won't have a problem with me."

Peeves actually saluted before shooting out of there.

Lucius Malfoy was now stunned, in magical inhibiting manacles and tightly bound, Amelia wasn't taking any chances as she replaced him in the chair with Barty Jr. "Lord Potter this man has already been sentenced to life in Azkaban and will be facing a dementor for escaping, would you mind if I carried out the questioning?"

"As long as we discover what his purpose was in the school I'm quite happy to defer to your expertise in this situation, the only reason I asked the others was that it would have been illegal for you to do so

and I want this one here in prison. His plot nearly cost me, my betrothed and more than a few friends of mine their lives.”

Amelia skilfully had Barty confessing how he escaped, first from Azkaban then his father's control, joining with his master and Pettigrew, putting Harry's name in the goblet and confirming his master had plans for Harry that he wasn't privy to. The entire hall was in shock at the level of corruption, conspiracy and just plain terror at the thought of Voldemort not being dead. Harry had spent the time whispering with Barchoke, Padfoot had been listening in and his wagging tail demonstrated his agreement.

A re-stunned Barty Jr. was wrapped up next to Malfoy as Amelia dispatched aurors to arrest Barty Snr. and free the real Mad-eye from his trunk.

“Madam Bones I would like to officially report three Hogwarts students for the attempted rape of another.” Harry pointed his hand towards the ceiling and the scene played out again, if anything it was even more shocking for those witnessing it for the second time. Dan Granger had his arms comfortingly around both Hermione and Luna as his emotions ran rampant, one part wanted to strangle the three bastards that attacked Luna while the other wanted to get down on his knees and give thanks for the ring that kept his daughter safe. A quick glance at his wife showed shared sentiments concerning their daughter and her boyfriend, the fact that both privately thought that, had it been Hermione being molested, all three boys would have died at Harry's hands would never be spoken of.

The aurors were moving to arrest the three before Amelia gave the order; cool, confident Draco had been replaced by a frightened and crying spoilt little boy, his two companions were too stupid to realise just how much trouble they were in.

It was a very nervous Harry who decided to go for broke, “Madam Bones, we have all heard that Pettigrew is alive and I, along with others in this hall have actually spoken to him, how can I get my godfather a trial?”

“Lord Potter he would need to surrender himself to the ministry and undergo questioning under truth serum, if that proved his innocence I can see no alternative other than to grant him a pardon.”

Harry pushed forward, “Since we have truth serum, the head of the DMLA, head of the Wizengamot and the minister for magic all present, would it be acceptable if he asked Hogwarts for sanctuary and we held the questioning here?”

“Yes but...” Amelia was about to say that she was here to arrest Fudge when those words died in her throat, the big black dog, whose head she’d been patting earlier, just turned into Sirius Black.

“I request sanctuary of Hogwarts!”

“Granted!” Harry very quickly placed Sirius under the castles protection, legally Amelia couldn’t touch him now.

“I gladly submit to questioning under veritaserum, I’ve waited thirteen years on this happening,” Sirius stuck out his tongue as Amelia pulled herself together, she was aware that she had rather beautifully been manipulated into this position but, since she was asking the questions and the serum would allow no lies, she administered three drops.

After establishing that he was indeed Sirius Black, the serious questions began.

“Have you ever been a death eater?”

“No.”

“Were you the Potter’s secret keeper?”

“No, that was Peter.”

“Did you kill those twelve muggles?”

“No, that was Peter, the rat escaped down a sewer.”

“How did you escape from Azkaban?”

“As a dog, Peter was in the Gryffindor dorm with Harry.”

“How did you escape from Hogwarts?”

“My godson and his betrothed helped me.”

“Madam Bones, I think we have all heard enough to establish my godfather’s innocence.”

Amelia administered the antidote as a beaming Sirius asked “Yes?”

“I can see no other course of action but to grant an immediate pardon to Sirius Black...” Barchoke handed her the appropriate paperwork awaiting signature.

Dumbledore signed it immediately, anything that made him appear in a good light to Harry was always going to get done now. Cornelius was delighted to be signing, unaware that this was his last act as minister of magic. Amelia rounded off a quite wonderful morning by signing the pardon, arresting Fudge, warning Dumbledore he was under investigation before leaving with six prisoners, she even got a farewell hug from Susan.

McGonagall noticed it was now approaching lunchtime but had no qualms about the students missing classes this morning, the happenings in the great hall had definitely been educational.

Victor was amazed at this boy and what he achieved here this morning, he now reckoned Harry Potter was his main competition in the tri-wiz and could only hope he didn’t play Quidditch, Victor got the impression that this lad would bring the same intensity to everything that he did.

Cedric was delighted that everyone now knew for certain Harry didn’t enter his name into the goblet, it could have been quite embarrassing

if Hufflepuff house had shunned the lad because his name had come out the cup. The change in headmasters was a welcome one since the vast majority of the students only saw Dumbledore at mealtimes. Cedric had always felt the old wizard had too many irons in the fire and the school should actually benefit from having a full time headmistress, especially one who still taught students. Now all he had to worry about was the first task in a couple of weeks.

Fleur watched the proceedings and it only made Harry more attractive to her, he was already rich and powerful, add double Hogwarts heir with the ability to disregard her Veela charm and you had an individual that any of her kind would go crazy over. By their very nature, Veela were always on the lookout for the best mate, they would have to look long and hard to find a better candidate than Harry Potter. What Fleur failed to notice was the glares she was receiving from the Gryffindor girls, Neville had spoken of the corridor incident and no-one poached a boyfriend from a Gryffindor girl. Fleur was going to be having another corridor incident where a few facts of Hogwarts life would be explained to her.

Ron had no appetite, even watching Malfoy and his conies expelled couldn't improve his mood, if only he had waited until Potter revealed he was the heir of Gryffindor but no, he had to shout out in front of everyone again! Not only had this driven a wedge further between him and his former friends but the whole of Gryffindor would no longer be speaking to him. They now had proof Harry didn't enter his name so he had been wrong about everything since Halloween, hearing that the Veela was after him and Harry wasn't interested baffled Ron more than anything, how could he choose Hermione over Fleur? Ron was going to give lunch a miss and concentrate on that problem, he felt the answer to that question would also provide answers to his problems.

Harry sat at lunch as Hermione introduced her parents to their friends, he was knackered and McGonagall had asked to meet with them after lunch, he watched Sirius enjoy his first meal as a free man while chatting to the Gryffindors. He was obviously remembering better times spent at this table with another Potter but they couldn't look back, only forward to hopefully a better future.

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Barchoke was back in Gringotts after reducing the number of guards at the module, he decided to leave the ones at the Quibbler for now. Young Miss Lovegood was already penning this morning's event for the next issue which should be just as explosive. The knock on his door was followed by a request for his presence on the bank main floor, the sight that greeted him was totally unexpected.

There were twenty seven witches and wizards, of all ages and every walk of life waiting on him. They all had two things in common though, the unmistakable gleam of greed in their eyes and a dead rat in their hands. They should have printed the fact that when an animagus is killed they revert back to their human form, Barchoke couldn't help but think the rat population in Britain was heading for a downturn in numbers.

-oOoOo-

Peter was staring at himself looking back at him from the front page of the Quibbler, the hundred thousand galleon reward almost caused him to throw up there and then. Most of the death eaters he'd met would sell their entire families for a lot less than that, even his rat form no longer offered him any protection. He was going to have to stick close to his master from now on, things were really bad when that was his safest option.

A/N Thanks for reading

My next posting will be Chapter 9 FG2

Chapter 7

They left to meet McGonagall as Luna stayed to chat with Colin about pictures for the Quibbler, Neville's nod confirmed that the Gryffindors would watch over the girl, though given the demonstration of what happened to the last group who tried to mess with Luna, within the castle she was probably as safe as Hermione.

They sat as Minerva greeted them, "Sirius it's so good to see you again and free as well, though I can't condone your treatment of Lucius Malfoy I did have to hide my laughter. Your godson here would seem to be living up to his inheritance, having led us all a merry dance this morning."

"Thank you Professor, it really is nice to walk about without wagging my tail. As to my godson here I'm worried for what he'll come up with next."

"Funny you should say that Sirius," the room occupants collectively held their breath awaiting Harry's latest revelation, "I assume Hogwarts is in dire need of a defence Professor until the real Moody gets back on his foot." The groan from Sirius was more to do with anticipating where Harry was going with this rather than his bad joke.

"Sirius will be staying with us and could easily keep an eye on the job for him until Christmas."

Another bad joke groan was covered by Minerva, "I like the idea but why Christmas?"

This is the bit Harry knew he was going to have a hard sell with, "I would also like him to be Head of Slytherin and try to turn the house around." Hermione, Minerva and Sirius were all staring at him as if he had two heads while Dan and Emma didn't have enough knowledge to understand what was going on here.

"Sirius a once proud house has been perverted by Riddle and his disciples, reclaiming Slytherin and turning its members away from the darkness would be a massive victory for the light. You were raised

with the pureblood doctrine and rejected it, lost people close to you through the madness and been where most of that house would appear destined to end up. You've been there, seen it, done it and still carry the scars, when you talk, they'll listen. If they don't get the proper guidance most of them will repeat the sins of their parents and we'll never end this circle of hatred and violence. Salazar and Godric think you're the right person for the job, anyone who can piss on Lucius Malfoy in the great hall gets my vote."

Minerva could quickly see the sense in Harry's words, Sirius knew what most of these kids faced because he already had, his brother and Harry's parents were just a few of the people close to him who had died at the hands of Voldemort. Sirius may have just lost the distinction of being the only person ever to escape from Azkaban but he could describe in minute detail to the students what it was like to be imprisoned there. The more she thought about it the more convinced Minerva became that this was the correct decision.

Sirius was staring at Harry with his mouth open before Hermione spoke, "Look at it this way Sirius, you will either go down in history as the wizard who saved Slytherin House or ended it for good, you can't lose!"

He burst out laughing, "Oh Harry, that is a prank worthy of any marauder, Professor if you'll have me I'll do it!"

Minerva was shaking her head but wearing a broad grin, "Well Mister Potter just who would you like to recommend for our new Head of Gryffindor, I assume you have someone in mind?" she asked teasingly.

No one was in the least surprised when Harry had an answer for her, "Well actually Headmistress I do, a former Gryffindor prefect to be precise but how do you feel about sacking a ghost?"

-oOoOo-

There was a celebration that night in their accommodation, Remus was the new Head of Gryffindor and History of Magic teacher with

Sirius being head of Slytherin and Defence Professor, both would be staying with Harry thus solving the 'werewolf in the castle' problem.

This delighted the Grangers as there would now be two adults looking after the kids while Xeno was ecstatic the people who'd tried to assault his daughter were going to face trial, the three students were just glad it was over.

Dobby escorted an excited Colin into the room, "Oh Harry, glad you're here, you got to see this!" Colin proceeded to place some eight by tens on the table that were breathtaking.

"Colin, how did you take these? I didn't see any camera flashes," Luna asked.

Colin was usually excited around Harry but tonight was putting Dobby to shame, it appeared as if it was taking all his will power just to stay still. "With the money from the Basilisk and considering my contract with the Quibbler, I bought a pensieve and the specialist camera equipment that allows me to take photographs of memories. I just play them back and click away."

Xeno was amazed, "Colin that is my next front page but Harry I think we may have been too clever here. In banning all Potter merchandising we will push the market underground, meaning people will pay higher prices for poorer quality goods. I'll pay Colin for using that picture in the Quibbler but, if he waived his fees I would print it for free and we could have an authentic 'Harry Potter' poster with all proceeds going to charity."

"I definitely want one of those, can you make the poster that it doesn't move though?"

"Mum!" A blushing Hermione moaned, "What do you want Harry's poster for?"

"Well the next time your Aunt Agnes comes over and starts boasting about your cousin Brenda's latest boyfriend I'll just point to the poster and say 'This is Harry, Hermione's boyfriend' and watch her face

collapse.” Dan, Sirius and Remus thought this was the funniest thing they had ever heard while Harry still hadn’t taken his eyes off the pictures.

Hermione gave her mother a strange look before asking, “And how would you explain the robes and sword?”

Emma’s smile was predatory, “Oh that’s easy dear, I’ll just casually mention that he’s a Lord and performing an official function, then fetch the smelling salts to bring her around after she faints.” The two marauders and Dan were now howling with laughter though both professors took a mental note not to mess with the Granger women, Dan of course was already well aware of this.

“Is that really me?” Harry asked. The picture was of Harry in the great hall, with his arm raised and the sword of Gryffindor in his fist. His eyes were practically glowing while the magic on display made his robe billow as his hair appeared to be blown by the wind. As a picture it was iconic, as a poster it would be phenomenal!

Hermione thought Harry’s modesty was one of his most defining features and adored the fact that he didn’t see himself the way everybody else did, “Yes love, that’s really you, now maybe you’ll understand why a Veela is chasing you!”

This got Remus’s attention immediately, “A Veela, tell me exactly what happened?” After Hermione had explained it, Remus filled in the gaps in their knowledge, “A Veela will feel compelled to attach herself to the best possible mate, her Veela magic would accept no less. I know you don’t believe this but you Harry have money, fame, great magical and political power, a title, throw in duel Hogwarts heir and a tri-wiz champion, that’s a pretty irresistible combination to a Veela.”

Hermione had her arm rather possessively around Harry as she pouted, “He didn’t even mention handsome, sexy with green eyes that could melt your heart.”

The answer Remus gave was surprising to the people there, “Hate to burst your bubble Hermione but Harry could have half his face chewed off and it wouldn’t matter to the Veela, on a purely biological

level she wants to breed with the most powerful male around and her Veela heritage would ensure any children could be nothing less than handsome.”

“What can we do about this Remus?” the now worried girl asked, how could Harry resist a relentless Veela determined to have sex with him?

Emma seen the worry in her daughter’s body language and wanted to know why, “Could someone please explain to us poor dentists what the hell a Veela is?”

Remus nodded, “Veela are females that are not what they appear, their heritage is clouded in mystery but their effects on males is well documented. They magically emit an allure that can have total strangers wanting to fight duels just for the privilege of being in the same room as them. In olden days wars have been fought over women who are now suspected to be Veela’s. The Veela in question is Miss Fleur Delacour, Harry needs to convince her that he already has a life mate then she will move on, her Veela senses will pick up on any deception though so you really have to mean it.”

Harry now placed his arm reassuringly around Hermione, “Best friend to girlfriend to betrothed and now life mate in the space of a week, you don’t hang about Miss Granger! Remus we don’t need to exchange rings, vows or anything like that, just convince her Hermione’s the only girl for me?”

Remus could only nod, dumbfounded at Harry’s new confidence, “That should be no problem then, I really think I should take my beautiful girlfriend on at least one date before the wedding. Secret chambers with dead basilisks in them is hardly romantic, don’t you agree love?”

Hermione’s hazel eyes were wide and focused intently on her boyfriend, did Harry realise he just said he would marry her, his smile told her that he did, her dad might have kittens with this but she didn’t care, Harry deserved to be kissed for that and she had no intention of disappointing him.

First Dan had trouble believing his ears and now his eyes were playing tricks on him also, he could have sworn his little girl was wrapped around Harry, trying to perform an appendectomy with her tongue, not something he was ready to see for at least another two decades.

Emma was over the moon, the prospect of Harry as a son-in-law was one that delighted her. Every parent wants their child to find someone who will love, cherish and protect them, even in the short time they had known Harry he had displayed every one of those qualities in abundance. The fact that he could ignore the allure of some goddess while her daughter was head-over-heels in love with him might have influenced her as well.

Sirius and Remus were desperate to make some sort of witty comment but held back, the kids have had a rough few days, just got Sirius set free and both of them new jobs, the marauders would give them a break, for now.

Harry finally surfaced for air as Hermione buried her face in his chest, she didn't want to see the looks she knew she'd be getting from her parents.

Still standing with his arms around his Hermione, Harry tried to remember the conversation before his betrothed pounced. "Ok where were we? Right run with the picture Xeno, yes to the poster idea and ask charities to apply for donations, I will match the funds raised by the poster galleon for galleon. Colin I'm sure you could take a non-magical picture of both Hermione and me that Emma could have on her wall, Sirius close your mouth you're dribbling. We will deal with the Veela problem tomorrow then Saturday the beautiful Miss Granger and I can have a date in Hogsmead, Dan and Emma you are welcome to spend the day with us exploring the only totally magical village in Britain, lunch is on me! Have I missed anything?"

"Only the part where Dan and Sirius here need to see Madam Pomfrey to get their jaws fixed from continually hitting the floor, what the hell has happened to you Harry?"

“It’s actually very simple Remus, I have gained a very smart girlfriend and control of my life, neither of which I have any intention of ever losing. The only way to do that is to step up and accept control, I’m taking advice from two Hogwarts founders, a very sneaky but brilliant goblin and not forgetting the lovely Miss Granger. My life has been run by others for whatever purpose they desired since I was left on the Dursley’s doorstep, a doorstep I never intend to cross over again. Yes I have been entered in this bloody competition by a murdering maniac out for my blood but, for the first time ever, I mostly know what’s coming and have a plan in place to deal with it, a plan that hopefully doesn’t involve spending time with Madam Pomfrey.”

“Em Harry, I assume you don’t want that repeated anywhere?”

“Colin please treat anything you hear in this house as confidential, Luna knows what she can print and I don’t really want our business discusses in the castle.”

Harry had asked Colin to do something, he would be saying nothing about his hero to anyone in the castle.

Xeno, Luna and Colin began working on today’s events for the next issue of the Quibbler, the Prophet was now running stories that were basically just re-writes of their material and even the gullible magical public were beginning to see that. The paper’s boy-who-must-not-be-named campaign had backfired spectacularly with subscribers defecting to the Quibbler in droves.

Dan really wanted to get hold of Harry for ‘a chat’ but had to defer to the boy’s godfather while Dobby offered him and Remus a much needed drink, he was delighted to see Emma taking Hermione away as well for a few words, the definitely liked her choice of boyfriend but this was all moving a bit too fast for the worried parents.

Emma walked Hermione to the library for their chat and tried to put her daughter at ease, “Tell me what’s got you so worried about this Veela girl?”

“Mum she is absolutely stunningly beautiful and that’s before you add the Veela allure, she was coming on to Harry in the corridor and my heart was breaking, thinking that Harry would rather be with her than me. Poor Neville was almost catatonic with the effect but Harry was ignoring her, his whole face lit up when he saw me - me, Hermione Granger the bucked toothed bookworm has a gorgeous boyfriend who prefers her to a Veela! I know it’s hard for you to understand mum but if you can imagine the most beautiful female film star walking into the room and dad not paying her the slightest bit of attention, instead focusing all his love on you, that gives you a small idea of what it’s like.”

Emma thought her daughter must be exaggerating but then again her natural tendency was to underplay things, she would reserve judgement until she laid eyes on this girl that had her daughter in a tizzy.

Now for the real reason behind this chat, “Hermione your father and I are slightly worried about what we’re seeing here, Harry seems a very nice young wizard who we’re delighted to get to know better but you both appear to be rushing into this relationship. What was it Harry said, ‘girlfriend to life mate in a week’ it’s not that we don’t trust you, more that you both appear to be so caught up in everything that it would be easy to get carried away, I hope you can understand our concern?”

Hermione knew this was coming from the moment she had pounced on her betrothed, she tried to explain, “Mum what you don’t understand here is Harry, he doesn’t make rash statements and always tells the truth, when Harry talks about life mate and wedding’s he’s not being flippant – he means it. Harry Potter is going to be my husband and I would marry him tonight if he asked me. Are we rushing this, from your point of view very much so but Harry and I have been facing danger together for years, this Voldemort will try and kill him again so, given that background I don’t think we’re rushing anything. Harry’s confidence is soaring and if me kissing him helps in any way then I fully intend to continue, the fact that I love him with all my heart and need to reassure myself he actually returns those feelings might play a major part as well. We haven’t progressed beyond kissing yet but once we’re both ready we will, it may be next

week, next month or next year but it's a decision we will both take. This ring might have been originally put on my finger for my protection but it now means I'm going to be Mrs Potter, only the timing is still to be determined."

Emma hugged her daughter, "I've known for a while now how you felt about the boy and it's very easy to see what he thinks of you, I was going to say you had your whole lives in front of you but with a mass murderer in the picture then I can kind of see where you're coming from, just be very careful and try not to flaunt it too much in front of us."

Hermione was hugging her mum, "When the person you've been dreaming off practically asks you to marry him, I thought I was quite restrained."

"Hermione if that was you being restrained I never want to think what happens when you let your hair down." Both women giggled at that, Emma knew her daughter was grown up and couldn't fault her choice of boyfriend, she wished they were a little older but had learned long ago to be thankful for what you had rather than wishing for something you couldn't get.

Sirius and Harry were also having a chat, "Harry you are my godson but I'll tell you this up front, if you are leading that young lady on then I am going to kick your arse all around the castle. You do realise what you said in there earlier?"

The smile on Harry's face could have lit the room, "Sirius I know exactly what I said in there and I meant every word of it, Hermione is my girl and if it takes me saying that in front of a Veela for her to believe me then that's exactly what I'll do. Having her by my side and the knowledge that I'll never have to return to the Dursleys has left me feeling ten feet tall, I'm not about to beat Hermione in exams or out-duel Dumbledore but I'll bet my patronus could kick the shit out of his with how happy I'm feeling."

Sirius was also a lot happier after that answer, nothing would give him more pleasure than to welcome the young witch who helped save his life into the family, he was now faced with giving Harry 'the talk',

he had intended to pass on to his godson all his secrets and techniques for 'getting to know' women but it would now appear unnecessary, he'd already made his decision and, like his father's choice of Lily before him, Sirius couldn't fault it.

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An entirely different talk was taking place in the Three Broomsticks where there was a distinct shortage of happiness or smiles.

"This is a nightmare Albus, that little shit Potter will now be insufferable, I'm sacked, your demoted, Black free and both Malfoys arrested, I can't believe you let him away with that."

"Severus I was no more than a spectator in the proceedings, I fully expected to be barred from the castle like yourself." Albus placed a shrunk trunk on the table, "These are your belongings, I have been forced to move into your former quarters since I'm now teaching potions. I shall endeavour to try and influence the young man to allow you to return but I can make no promises."

If both wizards were honest with themselves they knew there was more chance of the Chudley Cannons winning the league than Severus ever setting foot in Hogwarts again, his dark mark would bar him even if Harry didn't.

"What will you do now Severus?" Albus asked, knowing the man had few options and even fewer friends.

"With Barty Jr. confirming that the Dark Lord is returning my choices would appear to be limited to joining him or fleeing the country, with you under investigation and Fudge arrested I think I'd better leave sooner rather than later in case our new minister decides to arrest any marked death eaters. Without your protection I wouldn't survive a trial, returning to the Dark Lord holds little attraction so Australia beckons."

Dumbledore was relieved, he was well aware that getting himself back into Harry's good graces was going to be a most difficult task

without the spectre of Severus slinking in the background. With the running of the school no longer his responsibility and his Chief Wizard duties under investigation, Albus would have a lot more time to concentrate on his main objective, regaining Harry Potter's trust so he could once more guide the young wizard to fulfil the destiny Albus had long ago mapped out for him.

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Amelia Bones was having a celebratory drink in the Bones ancestral home, she'd had a stellar day by whatever criteria she used to measure it, even Susan pointing her wand in her face was a highlight as her niece and schoolmates displayed the courage of their convictions.

The confession from Lucius Malfoy saw the wizard introduced to a dementor and, along with the financial documents from the goblins, would ensure that Fudge came to a sticky end.

Barty Couch Snr. was arrested while his son had a heavy date with the same dementor that wined and dined on Lucius, the junior Malfoy and both his cronies were already expelled from Hogwarts, quickly confessed to their crime, given their ages all three had their wands snapped and their magic bound.

Even on a stellar day though a little rain will fall, this toad shaped raincloud took the form of the now Acting Minister, former Senior Undersecretary Deloris Umbridge! Amelia still believed though that every cloud had a silver lining, in this case the law that stated a new minister must be appointed within forty days of the post becoming vacant. Amelia believed that detestable Deloris didn't stand an amphibian in hell's chance of being elected minister and anyway, what harm could she cause in less than six weeks?

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Fleur was heading into the great hall for breakfast in the hope of once more seeing Harry Potter, the fact that he could offer resistance against her Veela allure just about made him irresistible in the eyes of the blond French student. Those same eyes were suddenly full of

three witches wearing Gryffindor robes, a quick glance over her shoulder revealed another trio of similarly clad witches closing in from behind.

The three Gryffindor chasers, two former dorm-mates of Hermione's and the youngest Weasley had the Veela boxed in, Katie Bell then explained precisely how things worked in Hogwarts.

"When a wizard chooses to go out with a Gryffindor girl, all of her female housemates respect and protect that girl's relationship. Harry has chosen Hermione so that means he's off limits to all of Hogwarts."

This was not the first time Fleur had encountered a reaction like this but it was certainly the first where the girl directly involved was not a member of the reception committee. "I am delighted for you that such an arrangement exists but feel I must point something out, I am not of Hogwarts."

That French accent was really grating on Ginny's nerves, "We are so glad to hear that but I feel I must now point something out to you, we are currently standing in a Hogwarts corridor where six wands say this is our patch so our rules apply to all."

"Not today they don't!" the group spun round to see an enraged Hermione Granger with her wand already in her hand, Harry was standing back in the knowledge that Hermione could deal with this.

Ginny was beaming, "Sorry, my mistake, seven wands..."

She was interrupted by Hermione, "No Ginny this stops now! Sorry girls but if I need you threatening other witches to stay away from my Harry then what message would that send out about our relationship? Thanks but no thanks, I appreciate the thought and loyalty but this is not the answer."

"But Hermione she's a Veela!"

Hermione's rage had been kindled at the sight of a gang of girls surrounding another, like Fleur it was a situation she was overly familiar with but for totally different reasons. "So she's a Veela! That does not excuse the bullying taking place here. Picking on someone because they're different can never be justified whatever the circumstances. Does she fancy Harry? I would say that's a definite yes but how many witches in this corridor alone would like to answer that question honestly, far less the great hall." Hermione's voice now softened, "I've only ever had Harry stand up for me in the past so thank you, but please leave us to deal with this problem."

If the six witches who filed past them were confused that was nothing compared to Fleur Delacour, she couldn't believe what just happened and now this girl was apologising to her – in French, this whole situation was nuts!

"Miss Delacour I'm sorry for the behaviour of my friends, they misguidedly thought they were showing me loyalty when in fact they were displaying a trait I abhor, I apologise for any hurt they caused you. I am Hermione Granger, you've met my betrothed Harry Potter and we would like to be your friends."

Fleur was beginning to wonder if one of those girls had cast a spell on her or perhaps this was some elaborate plan to mess with her head, if that was indeed the plan then it was working as she hadn't a bloody clue what was going on here.

Harry wrapped his arms around Hermione from behind and kissed her cheek, "Fleur, unfortunately I don't speak a word of French so have no idea what my beautiful betrothed just said. Knowing her like I do though I would be willing to wager she apologised for our friends and offered our friendship to you."

The French Veela could only nod which brought a smile to Harry's lips, "You see Fleur my beautiful Hermione here is my life mate, my inspiration to be a better wizard and the future mother of our children. You are a very pretty girl Fleur but in my eyes no one even comes close to my Hermione."

His Hermione was in heaven at her betrothed's words, she spun round in his arms and proceeded to provide evidence that perhaps last night's kiss may qualify for being re-classified as restrained after all, fortunately there were no other Grangers present to witness this.

The only person who did witness the new evidence was currently having to get used to the idea that the title of Lady Potter was well and truly taken, from the display presently still underway the title was never up for grabs in the first place. Her Veela magic was confirming what her eyes were telling her, these two were life mates and no Veela would ever have power over Harry because of this. Having someone resist your allure was one thing but when that resistance was formed because he was totally in love with another, a Veela always withdrew. It was not in their nature to settle for being second best in any relationship and, as far as Harry was concerned, even a Veela would always be a distant second to Hermione.

Considering the deeds she'd seen, heard and read about concerning these two, Fleur decided she would be delighted to have them as friends, she definitely didn't want them as enemies because their enemies tended not to be around for very long.

Ginny watched as a dishevelled Harry and Hermione entered the great hall with Fleur, she would have suspected a fight if not for the beaming smiles her friends wore, she noticed they stopped to talk to Cedric for a moment before both of them made their way to the Gryffindor table.

"Sorry you guys, we thought we were helping..."

Ginny never got to finish her sentence as an incredibly jovial Harry pulled her into a one armed hug, his other still being around Hermione. "Don't worry about it Ginny, no harm done and thanks for thinking about Hermione."

The youngest Weasley was bright red from the unaccustomed contact with Harry and getting the full blast of those green eyes from a distance that was measured in inches. She could quite happily have stayed there for the rest of the morning but of course her prat brother had to open that stupid mouth of his without first engaging his brain.

“One girl not enough for the great Harry Potter or does being the heir of two founders mean you can get as many as you want, Hermione, Looney, the Veela and now you’re slobbering all over my sister, who’s next on the list Potter?”

Ron’s attempt at portraying Harry in a bad light was totally ruined when Romilda Vane butted in, “There’s a list? How the hell was that kept secret and where do I sign?”

Ginny went to pull away, now embarrassed by her brother’s behaviour but Harry held her tight, “Ginny, unlike some I could mention, is a good friend but never think for a second that Hermione isn’t the only girl I’ll ever need. Luna is under my protection so I would ask you to stop calling her that name while ‘the Veela’ as you so eloquently phrased it is Miss Fleur Delacour who we’re having dinner with tonight. Which reminds me, Ginny, Neville, Colin would you like to join us? Cedric Diggory has already said he would and I intend to invite Victor Crum as well.”

Harry was aware this was rubbing salt into the open wound that was Ron Weasley but he was past caring, when the world didn’t revolve around the red head then he tended to lash out at the nearest target, which would no longer be Hermione if Harry had anything to do with it.

Ginny, Colin and Neville all quickly agreed as Hedwig flew in and landed on Harry’s shoulder, preening her wizard’s hair as she waited on him writing the invitation to Victor Crum.

Dean Thomas was shaking his head in mock disbelief, “Even the bloody owl is female and all over him, what’s the secret Harry mate, help us mere mortals out here.”

Harry’s drool answer of “Animal magnetism” had bits of breakfast flying everywhere as the Gryffindor table exploded into laughter.

All except a livid Ron Weasley who took the opportunity to make his way unnoticed out the hall, he could have been wearing a pink tutu and nobody would have noticed him leaving, Ron was beginning to

understand what his outbursts were costing him, that without Harry Potter's friendship that's just what he was, a nobody!

He hadn't intended to say anything but watching Harry enter with his arm around Hermione while chatting to the Veela was bad enough, when he later put his arm around Ginny as well Ron just couldn't hold it, especially as it was clear Ginny was loving the attention and would have stayed in Potter's arms all bloody day.

His sister had remained friends with Potter and was now rich, the centre of attention because Harry had sat beside her and was going to be having dinner tonight with a Veela and Victor Crum. Sometimes the expression 'it's not fair' just didn't cut it.

Ron made his way down to potions early and alone, thankful at least that it wasn't Snape awaiting him, at the moment he needed any good news he could get.

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Albus made his way from the dungeons up to his former office before realising that Minerva hadn't told him the password, his temper was rising with each minute he stood there guessing before she took pity on him and ordered the gargoyles to grant the old wizard entrance.

"Sorry Albus, must have slipped my mind to give you the password which is 'happy days' by the way. Now what can I do for you professor?"

Albus was not amused, not since two students decided they couldn't be bothered turning up to his lesson, "Headmistress McGonagall I wish to report two students deliberately missing my class this morning, I saw them both at breakfast yet they didn't attend their scheduled potions lesson."

He placed the register on her desk where the names of Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were highlighted, "My apologies Professor Dumbledore but I will deal with this matter immediately!"

Minerva reached for a quill and scored through both the highlighted names as Albus was almost in an apoplectic rage, "What is the meaning of this Minerva?"

"It's quite simple Professor Dumbledore, neither Lord Potter nor his betrothed wish to come within fifty feet of you. Manipulating Harry was one thing but going after Miss Granger is something they will never forgive you for, any chance you had of regaining their trust died when you visited the Granger home. They were both in the castle this morning to consult with me regarding their continuing education, and to invite me to diner tonight. Pomona and I will be dining with them and the other champions, Filius will be in charge of Hogwarts, was their anything else Professor Dumbledore?"

Albus felt he was dismissed like a misbehaving first year as he made his way down the familiar spiral stairs, that Harry wanted nothing to do with him was a body blow. The boy must be brought back under his watchful eye but he would have to let the dust settle before making his effort at reconciliation, at least Albus would still be involved in the tournament since he had been headmaster when the names were drawn. He would have to watch carefully for any opportunities that presented themselves before the boy became too independent, the last thing Albus wanted was Harry Potter surrounded by competent people offering advice but it would appear that was exactly what was happening. He'd lost Hogwarts, appeared set to lose the chief warlock title and was now loosing control of Harry, maybe this tournament wasn't such a good idea in the first place.

-oOoOo-

Victor took the note from the beautiful bird which was clearly waiting on an answer, an invitation to dine with Lord Potter, his family and friends, the other champions and some professors, he quickly replied in the affirmative as the white owl left with his answer.

Ever since Karkaroff was exposed as a death eater and barred from Hogwarts, all the fun had gone out of this competition, where was the honour worth fighting for when the school employed a man like that to be its headmaster?

Victor had been very impressed with the way that Lord Potter had handled that whole morning, offering polite respect to Drumstrang students when he would have easily been within his rights to order them all out of the castle. The only time he had seen a crack in his sense of honour and fair play was when he spotted the three Slytherin boys at the end of the table, after having watched the memory projected on the ceiling Victor thought it was perfectly understandable, had that been a female friend of his being attacked the Bulgarian doubted if he could have shown the same restraint.

This seemed like a perfect chance to accomplish what he thought this trip was all about, meet people from the other schools and make friends, something he had trouble with in Bulgaria because of his fame, he would have to ask Lord Potter how he coped with his. After all Victor had only become famous recently, while the-boy-who-lived had been dealing with the problem his whole life.

-oOoOo-

Hedwig also distributed a few more invitations at lunchtime, Ron Weasley sat and watched as, one by one, Susan Bones, Hannah Abbot, Daphne Greengrass, Tracy Davis and Millicent Bulstrode were all invited to dinner at Potter's tonight. He watched as surprise and excitement raced through each girl's face when they received their invitations from Hedwig, Millicent appeared ready to pass out with shock!

Ron watched all this as an outsider, contemplating what might have been until the twins sat beside him, "No letters from Hedwig for you pair, looks like Potter doesn't want you two around either!"

"Au contraire little brother, we shall both be dining with the rather lovely Miss Delacour tonight."

"Not to mention Victor Crum!"

"Fred I told you not to mention Victor Crum, our little Ronniekins here is all sensitive about that. Anyway Harry already asked us to dinner earlier in the week to discuss some business with him."

“Sorry George, I thought you meant just add ‘not to mention’ in front of the world’s second best seeker, I won’t mention we’re having dinner with Victor Crum again.”

“That’s the best thing to do there brother, it must be hard for our youngest here to realise that he’s made such a balls up of everything that Harry now rates Millicent Bulstrode a better friend to him than Ronniekins here.”

“Yeah a fact that the prat seems only to willing to prove every chance he gets.”

“Next thing you know Percy will be getting an invite.”

“You did it again George, took that joke too far, you need to learn to quit while you’re ahead, Harry inviting Percy!”

“But Fred in the concept we’re using at this time it’s relevant, at the moment there is more chance of Harry inviting Percy to dinner than Ron.”

“At the moment there’s more chance of Harry inviting Snape than Ron!”

“And you accused me of taking things to far?”

Ron was trying to tune out both of his brothers as he assessed the situation, it was indeed a bad day when the only crumb of comfort available was that Harry hadn’t invited Percy – well not that he knew of anyway!

A/N thanks for reading.

I will be concentrating on this story for the next few weeks.

HHHHHHH

Chapter 8

Emma was being introduced to the guests as they arrived, she'd already met the Gryffindor contingent in the castle yesterday but the rest were strangers and she definitely wanted to cast her eyes over this Fleur girl. Putting a rival for your boyfriend straight was something Emma could understand but then inviting her to dinner? Only Harry and her daughter could come up with something like that. She noticed the blond girl and, while no one could deny she was beautiful, Emma felt she was right, a worried Hermione had exaggerated the problem. That was until Hermione introduced the blond girl as Daphne Greengrass!

Victor Krum and Cedric Diggory were next to arrive and Emma found her hand being kissed by the handsome Bulgarian, not to be outdone the dashing Cedric followed the other champions example.

Minerva and Pomona followed, expressing their delight at being invited, so while Emma's attention was diverted suddenly a girl who could only be Fleur Delacour was in front of her without warning. Emma's first instinct was to look for Dan but she crushed that mercilessly, if Hermione could invite this goddess to dinner then she was not going to embarrass her daughter. She greeted the girl in French before kissing her on both cheeks, pleased that she'd held herself together while proud of her daughter for the way she was handling this. If Harry could resist the charms of Miss Delacour because of his love for Hermione then any semblance of doubt or uncertainty was removed from her mind, Harry Potter was going to be her son-in-law one day and nothing she or anyone else said was going to matter.

Dan also greeted Fleur in the same manner as his wife, this was the girl who lost out to his daughter and all he could think of was that Harry had impeccable taste. Dan's love for his wife and daughter left him unaffected by any Veela allure, he would quite happily admit she was beautiful but, like Harry, in his opinion Hermione would always be the most beautiful girl in the world, except for her mother of course.

The next guests shocked Hermione but, being with Harry she was starting to get used to things like this, after the girl stopped hugging

and kissing Harry, Hermione found herself with her arms full of a very excited Penelope Clearwater.

“Oh Hermione it’s so good to see you again, I was so happy to learn that you and Harry had got together, everyone else saw it but you two. I couldn’t believe it when I got that owl from Gringotts, I screamed so much that Percy barged in with his wand drawn, that cheque changed our lives and now it looks like we both got our wizards.”

Penelope flashed her new engagement ring and glanced lovingly at her fiancé who was currently talking awkwardly with their host, “Don’t mind him Harry, Percy dear has had a rather trying week, your invitation arrived and I thought that’s just what we need, dinner with some friends to celebrate our engagement!”

Penelope and Percy as a couple always reminded Harry of a little weather house his aunt Petunia had, the woman coming out indicating it was going to be sunny while the man’s appearance forecast rain, both lived in the same house but never got together. Penelope was pure sunshine while Percy could cast a cloud over anything, if he mentioned ‘cauldron bottom thickness’ tonight then Harry would revoke both twin’s promise of good behaviour and allow them free reign.

McGonagall informed him that Penelope had been writing to her, desperate to thank Harry for his generosity so he decided to get everything over with on the same night, his plans for the weekend included nothing but Hermione and some time to get to know her parents better.

Percy actually looked ill so Harry decided not to tease him too much, “Yeah things must be rough at the ministry when you discover that the Minister of Magic is the biggest crook in the country and the Head of International Magical Cooperation was using unforgivable’s on his death eater son, who he actually broke out of Azkaban, to insure his cooperation.”

Percy’s face lost any semblance of colour but that might just be the fact that he spotted his twin brothers, “Rough week” was his only

comment before kissing Hermione on the cheek and moving on with Penelope to meet the others, already wishing he'd stayed at home.

Millicent was using every scrap of her willpower to prevent herself hyperventilating, she just had no way of dealing with this situation without coming across as a stupid, giggling little girl, which would probably ensure she never got an invite again but Merlin's beard, she, Millicent Bulstrode was sitting across from Victor Krum having dinner!

With four tri-wiz champions, three heads of house, two muggle parents and the new Headmistress of Hogwarts, Millicent had to stifle the giggles at the thought of a partridge in a pear tree. This was illustrious company for the girl who could hardly get any one to talk with her in Slytherin, never mind the rest of the houses.

The conversation was morphing from one subject to the next, no one person hogging it and everyone participating, Victor's deep voice might have been heavily accented but Millie hung on his every word. She was desperately trying to memorise everything around her so she could spend days telling her mother about the best night of her life when she went home for Christmas.

The attention switched in Percy's direction with mention of the new acting minister, Minerva asked him what he thought of Deloris and he mumbled some meaningless platitude back, Harry interrupted him.

"Percy you're a former Gryffindor head boy, when McGonagall asks for your opinion that's what she wants, your opinion not some sanitised press release."

The pressure that Percy had been feeling all week exploded from the young man, "Deloris Umbridge is a cunning, conniving, backstabbing, eat your baby for breakfast if it furthers her career, walking pile of shit! Is that what you wanted to hear Lord Potter?"

"If that is your opinion then that is exactly what I wanted to hear, look around you Percy and you'll see our world is changing, yesterday most of the students in Hogwarts drew their wands and

stood for justice against a team of aurors. Susan my thanks because I know it must have been particularly hard for you to do.”

A blushing but beaming Susan answered, “I did it because it was the right thing to do Harry.”

“That’s what I mean though, we all have an opportunity here to change our world, we have reshaped Hogwarts and, with Luna’s writing and Colin’s pictures we can now tell the truth about just what is going on around us but only if people are courageous enough to stand up for what they believe in. It’s time for straight talking and telling people what they need to know, not saying what you think people want to hear.”

Penelope’s eyes fastened on the little blond, “You write for the Quibbler? Oh I always wanted to be a journalist but you need to have the right connections even to get an interview for the Prophet.”

Luna laughed, “If you’re looking for a job then I have pretty good connections at the Quibbler, we’re swamped at the moment and that’s before tomorrow’s edition hits, we’re anticipating a mountain of owls ordering Colin’s fabulous picture of Harry that’s being printed as a poster for charity.”

All eyes turned to Harry at this revelation but there was a look of intense concentration on his face that caused Sirius to audibly gulp, “Oh shit, here we go again, whose life gets changed forever this time?”

Harry’s attention swung to the Bulgarian, “Victor what is your favourite charity?”

Victor had been given some coaching on how to answer questions after matches but, bearing in mind what Harry had said to the eldest redhead, he chose to be completely honest on this occasion. “My favourite charity is a local orphanage near my home, I do not make a lot of money yet because of my age and all the merchandising sold using my name - I never see a Knut of that! Fortunately a little gold goes a long way in my country but I give mostly of my time with the children which they and I enjoy. I had intended any prize money I won

from this competition would be donated there.” Victor’s English may have been heavenly accented but the emotion in his voice broke through any and all language barriers.

Harry was so pleased he had invited Victor here tonight, “What if I could promise you at least a thousand Galleons to donate to that orphanage, would you be interested?”

McGonagall cleared her throat, “Lord Potter is this something that myself and others should be listening to?”

“Professor I’m deeply hurt, my betrothed’s parents are here and I’m trying to make a good impression, not helped by you thinking your star pupil is up to no good!”

A round of chuckles turned to laughter at McGonagall’s quick answer, “If Miss Granger gets up to no good it’s because of the company she keeps.”

Harry steered the conversation back onto topic, “The poster of myself will be sold with all monies raised going to charity, I just had the thought that a poster of the four champions would probably sell even more, providing funds for the champions to donate to a charity of their choice.”

Millicent couldn’t help herself, “I would definitely buy at least one Harry!”

His smile had the Slytherin blushing, “Thank you Millicent, since you’re our first potential customer I’ll see that it gets signed as well.” Millie just got her Christmas present early.

Harry’s attention turned to the French girl who had also decided that honesty would be the best policy here, “I think that is a very good idea though I am ashamed to say that I have never even thought of a charity, but Victor’s words moved me so much I would like any share of mine to go to that orphanage.”

Ever the gentleman, Cedric came to the French Veela’s aid, “There is no need to feel ashamed Fleur, I have no charity in mind either and

like you would really like to see any share of mine go where it's needed most, an orphanage in Bulgaria sounds fine to me."

A smiling Harry turned his attention back to Victor, "So we're agreed, the first four thousand galleons go to the orphanage that Victor nominated and we'll discuss any funds exceeding that amount if and when the need arises."

Hermione was so proud of her betrothed she couldn't contain herself, though with her parents and McGonagall here she limited it to a quick kiss that promised so much more later. "Harry I think you should see Barchoke about setting up your own charitable company, how about a logo? A snowy owl icon could let people know they're buying a genuine product. We could also find out if there was anyway Victor could stop all these people making money from his name, Ron bought that action figure and it stopped working shortly after the world cup, leaving a lot of people thinking Victor was associated with shoddy goods and poor workmanship."

The expression of adoration on Harry's face confirmed to the entire room these two were meant to be together, Percy though was still smarting from the earlier comment and thought it was time for some payback. "What about Ron Harry, why isn't he here tonight? He was your best friend after all."

The whole mood of the evening changed and Penelope was ready to slap her boyfriend when Harry's cool and steady voice answered, "Ron has also had a very eventful week, when my name came out of the goblet his jealousy overwhelmed him and he accused me of being a cheating liar. As Hermione and I entered the great hall hand-in-hand he fired a curse at us, he's now curtailed himself to verbal sniping at every opportunity, hardly the actions of a best friend."

Percy found himself the recipient of quite a few death glares from people who'd witnessed most of Ron's behaviour.

"Hermione and I have also had quite the week, death eaters entering me in the competition, becoming betrothed then Dumbledore cursing Hermione's father to remove her from Hogwarts, aurors turning up here to arrest us for protecting Luna and my personal

guilty pleasure, my godfather pissing all over Lucius Malfoy in the great hall.”

Harry felt Hermione’s hand slip into his, “Now I think that would give me more of a reason than you Percy to be a grumpy bastard, instead I choose to look at the situation in a positive manner, I’ve just spent my evening having a great dinner with friends, family and the girl I love, what could be better than that?”

Penelope had her head down in embarrassment when Ginny spoke to her, “Penelope if that stupid brother of mine doesn’t get off his sorry arse and do something quickly I’m going to slap him silly, oh and welcome to the family, we could sure use some more female Weasleys.”

Percy cottoned on to the not so subtle hints and death glares from everyone present, his fiancée was such a likable girl and his actions had left most wondering about her choice of partner. “I’m sorry Penelope, I should be celebrating becoming engaged to the most wonderful woman instead of worrying about what might happen at work, can you forgive me?”

A quick kiss and make up later earned a comment from George, “Hey Percy do you give lessons?”

“Yeah because we just happen to know another Weasley who needs to learn to say sorry, wonder if you could talk to him,” was Fred’s contribution.

Harry decided to nip this in the bud before it went any further, they had been on their best behaviour and now it was time for their reward, “Guys, this is Padfoot and Moony, these gentlemen would like to talk some business with you.” Fred and George Weasley were very effectively neutralised for the night, not even their elder brother would be pranked.

Emma nudged Harry and whispered in his ear, he nodded before standing, “I’ve just been informed we should offer a toast the happy couple since we are the first one’s to hear the news, Penelope and Percy I would like us all to wish you every happiness and strapping’s

for your ribs after you tell Molly about this, we'll probably hear her squeals of delight all the way from Devon. After all it is only about five hundred miles!"

Anyone who'd ever seen Molly with her children was laughing as they stood to toast the very red faced but happy couple.

"Emma could you take the Professors into the library, they should find the books we took from the chamber interesting, there's a volume on transfiguration by Godric Gryffindor that Professor McGonagall may wish to borrow."

Minerva and Pomona practically dragged Emma with Dan following on as they headed towards this treasure.

"Colin do you have..."

Harry was interrupted as Dobby appeared beside the boy with his camera equipment, "Dobby you're amazing, you and Winky did a fabulous job tonight, please thank her for me. Colin and Luna if you want to come with us we could get this done just now. Hermione love, could you take our guests through to the lounge, I guarantee we will be quicker than the other two groups."

Harry led them through to the training room which they all admired while Colin set up his equipment,

"This is brilliant, the goblins certainly know how to look after their champion."

"Cedric you're welcome to use this, the library or any other facilities at any time, same for Fleur and Victor."

"Harry why are you doing this?" Victor asked, in his experience when someone 'gave' you something there was usually a price to be paid.

"It's simple, this whole tournament is supposed to be about promoting better relations between our schools, I suggest that's

exactly what we do. Originally my only aim here was to promote the goblins, tweak the ministry's nose and hopefully survive the bloody thing. I now find myself thinking those goals will only work if we all survive unscathed, I know from first hand experience just how dangerous this place can be and don't want to see anyone hurt, or even worse!"

Harry was now the recipient of thoughtful looks from his fellow champions, "All I'm suggesting is we don't buy into this 'honour of my school depends on me' rubbish, by becoming friends we can still enjoy a bit of rivalry without the madness that comes with it. Yes we compete to the best of our abilities but watch each other's backs throughout, I know I'm the youngest so could probably benefit most from this but I can assure you I will hold up my end of the bargain."

Fleur was already convinced, "What you did today spoke volumes about your character, I said then that I would be delighted to be your friend and nothing has changed that. I would like to win but not at the expense of someone here getting hurt, I like your idea of supporting one another very much."

Victor was also nodding, "My main reason for coming to Hogwarts was to hopefully make friends but our headmaster has us virtually confined to the ship, he is obsessed with winning this tournament but I am not. I become a professional Quidditch player this summer and a bad injury could end my career before it begins, all too please a headmaster who is a death eater, I think not. I very much like the idea of someone guarding my back and have no worries that Harry will not be up to the task."

Cedric was already sold on the concept, "Great idea so count me in, does that mean that if one of us discovers what the first task is they'll inform the other three?"

Harry waited until both Victor and Fleur had nodded in agreement before answering, "Funny you should say that, Colin and Luna you need to promise to keep this quiet..."

In the library Minerva was so engrossed in the selections available that the headmistress of Hogwarts forgot all about the Weasley twins

meeting with two of the biggest pranksters ever to come through the school. A decision that would have Minerva shaking her head for many years to come and wishing for early retirement.

Fred and George were jubilant, not only was their dream going to become a reality but they were going into partnership with their heroes. With financial backing and pranking input from two marauders, WWW couldn't fail to be successful.

Much to the astonishment of their guests, Hermione had a CD playing as the elves made sure everybody had a refreshment, Penelope and Percy actually had an ice bucket containing a bottle of Champagne as he tried to redeem himself for his earlier crass behaviour.

Hermione found herself chatting with three Slytherins, Tracy was curious how a Gryffindor ended up head of Slytherin, she tried to explain, "Sirius is a pureblood who rebelled against his family's dark beliefs, he doesn't have any pureblood bigotry, Sirius just doesn't think it's important in the grand scheme of things. We're talking about a man who escaped Azkaban because he knew his godson was in danger, a man who has more justification than most for becoming bitter and twisted yet, as you've seen, he's the life and soul of the party. Slytherin house needs to change direction or it will cease to exist, never doubt for a second that Sirius won't do his very best to achieve that, it's just not in him to do any less."

Daphne was desperate to find out how she and Harry had managed to save him, "I mean he was in a locked room in the tower, I know you're both clever but I just can't see how you pulled it off!"

"We had help from a feathered friend who I now wish had ripped Draco's arm right off." The gasps from the three girls made Hermione smile, she had no intention of mentioning the time turner to anyone.

Millicent decided to be brave and ask the question that had been driving her nuts since Hedwig had made her oh so special delivery, "Hermione, why was I invited here tonight? I'm still ashamed that I listened to that arse Malfoy over those badges."

“That’s exactly why you were invited Millicent, you realised it was wrong and admitted it in front of the entire great hall, that took a lot of courage and is exactly the attitude Slytherin is going to have to adopt if it’s going to be saved. Don’t think we didn’t notice you girls up on your feet with wands drawn yesterday, that was a pretty humbling experience actually. When Harry offered his friendship he wasn’t joking, he doesn’t joke about things like that.”

“I hope he wasn’t joking about that poster either, I really will buy that!” the sincerity in Millicent’s voice meant the others just smiled at her, to tease her obvious hero worship would have been cruel and she was amongst friends.

Harry was right, his group was back well before the others, the twins and marauders were swapping tales of pranks while crowbars plus a block and tackle might be needed to get a certain two witches out the library.

The other three champions were a lot more relaxed, yes a dragon was certainly no picnic but at least now they were aware of what faced them and could plan for it, the unknown had been getting to them. Luna had taken a small bio from each of the four champions which would appear on the poster while Colin was delighted with the shots he took and already planning the best way to take pictures of their contest’s against the dragons.

The dinner was splitting up as people headed home when Harry pulled Ginny aside, “Could you give this to Ron but it’s probably better if you don’t mention my name.”

Ginny read the piece of parchment before throwing her arms around Harry and kissing his cheek, “You’re a far better friend than that jealous arse deserves.”

Harry just smiled, “I can be a moody git as well sometimes but you do realise he’s eventually going to push it too far and it will come to blows? There’s no coming back from that so we’ll just try and stay out his way for now.”

Hermione noticed what Ginny held in her hand and her reaction was the same as the redheads, though the kiss was not on the cheek. "You Mr Potter have continually surprised me tonight, now I think it's time we bid our final few guests goodnight then you can start working on saying goodnight to me!"

Ginny tried not to laugh as Harry almost pushed her out the door, after all she couldn't fault his motives.

-oOoOo-

On discovering that he was the only Weasley sibling in the country who never got invited to Harry's dinner, Ron was gutted, so gutted that his famous temper never ignited, there was just no spark there.

Ginny sat beside her brother and handed a slip of parchment, "This is for you."

Ron read it and his hands began to tremble 'to Ron Weasley, Best wishes Victor Krum' he had his arm around his sister and tears in his eyes, "Thank you Ginny, you know how much this means to me? I wouldn't have had the courage to ask him for his autograph."

Ginny felt such a fraud, "I'm sorry Ron, I didn't get this for you, Harry did!"

Ron didn't know what to think, his big mouth had insulted Harry again today yet he'd asked Victor Krum for an autograph because Harry knew that Ron was desperate for one. He slowly made his way up to bed, eyes never leaving the precious parchment as his mind once more worked on the problem.

-oOoOo-

Acting Minister Deloris Umbridge sat at the ministers desk and smiled at this morning's edition of the Prophet, a toad faced woman wearing a pink cardigan smiled back at her from the front page as she began her quest to lose the word 'acting' from her job title.

Her plan was amazingly simple, tell the people exactly what they wanted to hear, claim credit for everything positive that happens while blaming her rivals every time something negative couldn't be silenced. Deloris had built her career using this method, that and being utterly ruthless with anyone who stood in her way.

Her front page story in the Prophet was the typical example of what the newspaper stood for, take a few facts and write the story whatever way suited their current needs, with Deloris leaning on them their current needs were to make her the next minister.

The headline set the tone of the entire newspaper:

You-Know-Who Dead!

Lord-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named Delusional!

The newspaper then went on to rubbish reports of a dead death eater teaching at Hogwarts while a ministerial conspiracy involving Fudge / Malfoy / Crouch was discovered and acted upon by none other than Deloris Umbridge.

As the wizarding public didn't want the dark lord to return, the acting minister was sure they would fall over themselves to believe every word of this, that was until an edition of the Quibbler landed on her desk and fairly ruined her morning. Something would have to be done about this!

-oOoOo-

Ginny rapidly approached a smiling Colin at breakfast, clutching a copy of the Prophet. "How can you sit there all calm and smiling, everyone here knows this is a load of tripe but others will believe this, I thought Harry was your friend?"

"Ginny calm down, yes Harry is my friend and I'm not worried because I know what's coming next."

Before she could grill any information out of the boy, Ginny was interrupted by the arrival of the Quibbler and a strange silence settled over the previously restless great hall. She managed to catch the front page and never even noticed the headline, her entire being was focused on the picture that was causing most of the females in Hogwarts to drool, sweet Merlin but Harry was so hot that boy should carry a ministerial health warning! Ginny eventually noticed the headline but had no idea how much time had passed in the process:

Dual Hogwarts Heir Wields Gryffindor's Blade in Defence of Castle!

The story went on to report on the captures and confessions, the exoneration of Sirius Black, the arrests and the background story that led to the whole episode, namely Draco Malfoy's attempted rape of a young pureblood witch. Luna's name wasn't mentioned but Draco and his cronies being stopped in their attempt, expelled from Hogwarts and their magic bound was all there in great detail.

Also covered was the probation of Slytherin house, how Lord Potter became the Heir of Slytherin as well as Gryffindor, the contempt Salazar Slytherin held for the half blood bastard Tom Riddle aka Lord Voldemort and a full section entitled, Dumbledore – worst headmaster ever?

With Dumbledore, Snape and Binns all losing their positions, the new staff structure at Hogwarts also made great reading.

Ginny could now understand why Colin was smiling, next to the Quibbler the Prophet was at best a joke with the new acting minister made to appear an arse. The most interesting thing in the entire edition of the Quibbler though was the order form for the Harry Potter poster, since this was the only way to lay hands on the much coveted item, the paper sold every copy of its record breaking print.

The picture of Deloris Umbridge that adorned the front page of the Prophet was no longer smiling, in fact she appeared ready to commit murder, the fact that no one even noticed as they were far too interested in the Quibbler did not improve the toad's disposition.

Ron Weasley was once more sitting alone, when he'd spied the front page of the Quibbler he'd almost started off on an anti-Potter rant again, almost. His thoughts drifted to his trunk that now contained his most prized possession, a possession that the person he was about to rant against had acquired for him. A calm Ron knew Harry well enough to know that it would not be an easy thing for him to ask for an autograph, he absolutely hated it when anyone asked for one from the-boy-who-lived.

'Why would Harry do this for him?' was added to 'Why would Harry prefer Hermione to a Veela?' as questions he needed to find the answers to, he also figured that the longer he took the less chance there was that he would ever get his friend back. Ron was sitting pondering this when Hermes flew towards him with a note from Percy, his brother was offering to help Ron work out his problem. Citing how he had recently allowed his ambitions to hurt Penelope, a thing he swore would never happen again, how he had the error of his ways forcibly pointed out to him and quickly apologised to his fiancée.

The passage that really got Ron's attention, and reminded him of just how clever Percy actually was, came near the end of the letter, 'Saying sorry isn't meant to be easy but sometimes it's not just the right thing to do, it's the only thing left you can do.'

Ron left for a wander around the castle, hoping for some inspiration to solve his problems, instead he got Sir Cadogan following him from painting to painting, continually berating Ron and challenging him to a duel, sometimes you just couldn't catch a break!

-oOoOo-

Harry and Hermione were currently enjoying a break from all the troubles that seemed to follow them around wherever they went, instead the pair were like young couples the world over and spending their Saturday on a date. As if to illustrate that they weren't like young couples the world over they had Hermione's parents along with them, to prove this point even more they had to keep their eyes on the adults as they meandered through the magical village.

Dan Granger was a happy man, his daughter was walking in front of them, holding her boyfriend's hand as they chatted away to each other. Discounting the magical surroundings, this is what Dan had been mentally prepared for, not the betrothal, life mate because a Veela was after his daughter's boyfriend, this Dan could handle.

He also felt better after his discussion with Remus, Dan was concerned about the power these rings wielded over Harry, maybe he'd just read Tolkien one too many times but a ring talking to you was not a good sign in any book he'd ever read. Remus explained that the rings offered Harry advice and helped to communicate with the castle, the decisions were still his to make. That a teenager found himself in this situation in the first place was a whole different ballgame and Remus had to prevent Dan bringing this up with Sirius, he'd just got his friend back and didn't want him ending up in Azkaban for attacking the Dursleys or Dumbledore for their treatment of Harry.

Hermione had alluded to Harry's home life not being what it should be, then with everything that happened to him in Hogwarts it's no wonder the boy grabbed the first opportunity to gain control of his life. For all this Dan couldn't fault the boy's manners or treatment of his daughter, how do you ask a lad about his prospects and if he'll be able to look after Hermione when he gives over a million pounds away because he didn't think he had earned it? Both parents had looked back over Hermione's letters sent home since she started attending Hogwarts and it was now easy to see her affection building for this boy, the fact that she always talked about him when at home was something they had just gotten used to.

Harry was so happy even the stares from the villagers couldn't dent his mood, the fact that it wasn't a Hogsmead weekend and his picture was on the front page of the Quibbler only added to the attention he was receiving. The reason for his happiness was currently holding his hand as they window shopped and explained to her parents what some of the sights were, Harry thought having to face a dragon was a small price to pay for Hermione being his girlfriend.

Just holding her in his arms was enough to keep Harry smiling all day but when she kissed him like she did last night then there was

nothing that could wipe the grin off his face. Hermione seemed determined to make up for all the years he was without affection and love, she promised to let him know how she felt about him every single day from now on and that was a future Harry was looking forward to.

It was hard for him to accept that Hermione had so little self esteem that she couldn't believe Harry could want to be with her, the kiss when he explained to Fleur that Hermione was the only girl for him blew his mind. Their kissing had escalated to the point that his hands had began wandering and he was forced to stop before he blew it, pushing her into something she wasn't ready for was just not going to happen, they had every intention of being together for a long, long time so there was no need to rush.

He was already making plans for Christmas to convey how much he loved this girl who had radically changed his life, it would have to be something special though as his Hermione deserved the best.

Hermione was currently in heaven, she was with Harry and her parents were accepting the situation, though she would have to be careful to keep her 'displays of affection' to a minimum in their presence or that could quickly change. She understood her mother's concern because as soon as she started kissing Harry all her common sense and intellect left her, it was replaced with a hormonal teenager who had the boy she loved in her arms. Harry had been the sensible one up until now but she'd been physically close enough to him last night to understand how hard it was for Harry to make that decision without him needing to say anything, her boyfriend had a will of iron, which was probably just as well.

Hermione hadn't envisaged herself kissing ever so the fact that Harry thought she was attractive and professed to love her had released something from inside that she was struggling to control, probably because she wasn't sure if she wanted to control it. Her whole life was about control yet when Harry glanced at her with those sparkling green eyes she would have said yes to anything. Part of her knew she was going to have to get a hold of this but she was so going to enjoy building up her 'kissing Harry' tolerance levels, it could take

years of extensive research and practical studies with very little written notes being taken!

-oOoOo-

Albus read the article concerning him in the Quibbler and thought he was probably fortunate that Harry had forced him to step down as headmaster, this article would not only have cost him his job but also seen him kicked out the castle as well.

When his blunders were listed like this there would have been no other option left open to the board, employing Voldemort with the stone in the school, that clown Lockheart and the Basilisk, the whole Sirius Black / Dementors fiasco. This was then topped off by one of his friends being replaced by a polyjuiced death eater, who was thought to be dead yet managed to enter an under aged student into a dangerous competition. That his decisions had endangered students, especially Harry Potter was beyond refuting.

Getting from this position to one where Harry Potter trusted him again could go down as his greatest ever achievement, especially with most of the students now so loyal to the boy. This was when the old wizard had his brain wave, not all the students had supported Harry and one in particular came to mind. He could subtly inform Ronald Weasley what Harry would be facing in the first task, thus the boy would be back with his friend and it would soon become clear where Ronald gained the knowledge, ingratiating Harry to Albus. The only problem that he could foresee was using the words 'subtlety' and 'Ronald Weasley' in the same sentence, even Hagrid handled the concept better and may be a good back-up plan.

-oOoOo-

Peter Pettigrew was currently disguised by use of a glamour charm, applied by his master because it was beyond his capabilities as a wizard. The dark lord demanded information and, thanks to Potter his rat form was a one-way ticket to a wooden box so Peter was now the proud owner of red curly hair and a bushy ginger beard.

His eyes were almost popping out his head at the details revealed by this issue of the Quibbler, informing his master that Potter was now the heir of Slytherin because he'd defeated the half blood bastard Riddle three times in combat was an even quicker and surer way to end up in the aforementioned wooden box.

Panic set in immediately as he spied the young couple strolling towards him, he had no trouble recognising Potter and Granger though didn't know the older pair who were with them. The death eater only had seconds to make up his mind whether to flee or hope his disguise fooled them, remembering how smart Granger was Peter decided not to take the chance. As he apparated away, his copy of the Quibbler floated to the ground, his master could read the shit that the Prophet printed because the truth in the Quibbler would get him killed.

Ending up as snake food was a long haul away from the wealthy and powerful future Peter had imagined for himself all those years ago when he became a death eater, spending thirteen years as a rat and then nursing the most powerful but ugliest baby on the planet was not mentioned anywhere on the death eater recruitment brochure!

A/N Thanks for reading

Chapter 9

Amelia steeled herself before entering the minister's office after receiving her summons, she was absolutely livid with the article had appeared in the Prophet and would have been here sooner if it wasn't for the Quibbler. Their acting minister had used the Prophet to mount her campaign for the full time post and found herself derailed by the truth printed in the Quibbler, Amelia was relieved as she welcomed the clean-up that had started in the ministry and had no intention of letting it slip back into the bad old ways.

She was quite certain why Dolores had sent for her and had no intention of complying with she-who-must-wear-horrible-pink-cardigans requests or orders, if her niece could stand up for justice then surely the head of the DMLE could do no less.

The sickly sweet voice that greeted her as she entered the room had Amelia grinding her teeth in frustration, knowing full well that this was all an act so that people would underestimate the toad like creature. "What can I do for you Madam Umbridge?"

"We have a publication printing anti ministry propaganda, I want it closed down and its owner arrested!"

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to close down the Prophet, it has printed lies for years and doesn't deserves to be called a newspaper."

Dolores stared at Amelia with her beady little eyes, if this was her idea of being intimidating then the head auror felt as if she'd just been mauled by a budgie.

"Hem-hem, I think you misunderstood me Madam Bones, the publication I had in mind was the Quibbler."

Amelia feigned surprise, "When you used the word propaganda I naturally assumed you meant the Prophet, - information, ideas, or rumours deliberately spread widely to help or harm a person, group, movement, institution or nation is my understanding of the word.

Every detail printed in the Quibbler was the truth while the Prophet's only intention would appear to be to promote Deloris Umbridge, could you tell me Madam Umbridge just how you brought these criminals to justice? You see I was there personally, can vouch for every word printed in the Quibbler and didn't lay eyes on you anywhere near any of the action. As an auror and head of the DMLE, it worries me when people can be places where I am without me seeing them."

Dolores tried to continue her sweetness and light act but the anger in her eyes betrayed the toad like woman if you knew what to look for and Amelia was no fool, "Never the less I am the minister of magic, you will go and close this publication down today, this is a direct order."

"NO!"

The acting minister just stared at the witch, unsure how to respond since she'd never been told 'no' before. Usually people just tried to weasel out of the task and Dolores enjoyed watching them squirm as she gradually whittled away their objections until they were forced to comply, someone saying 'no' to her face was not something she knew how to deal with. "What do you mean, no?"

Amelia squared her shoulders. "It's quite simple acting minister, you see everyone has to obey the laws of the land, just ask your predecessor. The quibbler has broken no laws and will not be closed for telling the truth, disagreeing with your version of events and you being left looking like a fool is not a crime."

"You will close down this publication or lose your job, the choice is yours to make Madam Bones."

"I don't think so acting minister, here's how it works when you're playing with the big boys. In just over five weeks Britain will have a new Minister of Magic, it will not be you and if you keep your head down Dolores I will allow you to walk away after the minister is elected. If you fight with me I will investigate in minute detail everything you've ever done since entering the ministry, we both know that your behaviour couldn't withstand such an investigation

and you would probably end up in the adjoining cell to Fudge. The choice is yours to make Madam Umbridge.”

The toad’s temper snapped, “How dare you speak to me like that, I demand respect!”

“Respect is earned and you have done nothing deserving of any, we both know if you reach for your wand I will decorate this office with you and that hideous cardigan. I’m well aware your usual modes operandi is to blindside your opponents but I have some very good people watching my back. Now I’ve got rid of Fudge’s lackeys and there’s no Malfoy spreading his gold around to get what he wants, we can look forward to better times. Enjoy your time as acting minister and then resign gracefully from the ministry, leave me and my department alone or we’ll come after you. I have no interest in the minister’s job, just as long as you don’t get it.”

Dolores was doing her catching flies impression as Amelia continued, “Please don’t take it personally, we have suffered for too long under ministers with delusions of adequacy, our country needs and deserves a strong, intelligent, honest minister, by no stretch of the imagination is that you.”

Amelia turned her back on the woman and left the office, leaving Dolores wondering how she was going to repair her shattered dreams.

-oOoOo-

Molly Weasley’s dreams were beginning to come true as she sat with Percy and Penelope, moisture gathering in the corner of her eyes, the first of her son’s to bring a girl home and now there would be a wedding to help plan. Arthur reappeared with a bottle of wine and glasses as they made to celebrate the happy news, with full glasses all around the head of the Weasleys proposed a toast. “To Penelope and Percy, may all your problems be little ones!”

The double meaning had Penelope blushing but she was spared by the arrival of an owl at the Burrow addressed to her, bearing a note that had Penelope very excited. “It’s from the Quibbler offering me a job, Luna must have put a good word for me.”

Arthur was chuckling, "Xeno Lovegood owns the Quibbler and trusts Luna's judgement so much he lets her write for the paper."

"When did you see Luna?" Molly wanted to know.

"Oh we were invited to dinner by Harry last night and of course Luna lives there, it was quite a gathering and a great evening."

She didn't want to ask but needed to, "Was Ron there?"

Percy shook his head, "Harry explained that Ron was still in conflict with him and Hermione, our Fred, George and Ginny were all there and agreed Ron's behaviour didn't merit an invitation. I've written to him offering my advice if he wants it because, from what was said at dinner last night, the next move is his to make."

Molly sighed, "We tried to speak to him and Minerva actually thought about suspending him, even the twins never got in that much trouble."

Arthur asked his future daughter-in-law about her job offer, "Oh it's what I've always wanted to do and, thanks to that cheque from Harry I can afford to take the chance. Harry spoke about our changing world last night and I don't think there is a better example of that than the contrast in today's newspapers. The Prophet looked dead compared to its rival and I doubt I'd be able to believe anything printed there ever again, the Quibbler is the future and I have a chance to get in at the very beginning of its rise, I intend to accept immediately."

Molly couldn't hold back any longer, "Ok you two, when's the wedding?"

-oOoOo-

The Hogsmead party returned full of good cheer, a smashing lunch and with purchases from the local stores, both Granger girls had seen things they loved in a clothes shop so Harry had bought them, to much indignation from Dan. That was until Harry pointed out that

neither his money nor credit cards were any use here, this led to Harry and Hermione being invited to the Granger home for the following weekend where lunch and any shopping would be on his betrothed's father.

They were greeted by the sight of Luna and Colin sitting at a table full of what turned out to be order forms for Harry's poster, Winky popped in with her arms full of the actual items and removed the ones that the teens had finished addressing, taking them away to be posted.

"Is that..." Harry stuttered.

"Oh Hello everyone, yes Harry this is your poster and we have quite a lot of orders. Winky is bringing bundles over as soon as daddy prints them so Colin and I can process them. If the champions poster does as well as this then Victor will easily get four thousand galleons for that orphanage."

"Can I see it?" Hermione asked anxiously.

Luna unrolled one and it literally took Hermione's breath away, she stood transfixed until a pair of arms encircled her from behind and she felt Harry's breath on her neck as he whispered lovingly to her, "They might own a poster love but my heart belongs to Hermione Jane Granger, never doubt for a second that I'm yours as long as you want me."

"That's going to be a very, very long time Harry."

"That suits me just fine love."

They were brought back to reality with Emma's words as she reached into her purse, "Ok, I don't care how much they cost but I want one!"

"Mum!"

"I don't care Hermione, we've spent years having to cover up just how brilliant our daughter is, now she has a wonderful boyfriend and I

have no intention of hiding that fact as well. I'll say its new technology or something but that is going in a frame on our wall at home."

Harry stepped forward and placed his hand on the poster, as the hair and robes billowed he commanded "Stop!" while pushing some magic into it. The result was a poster that didn't move but now appeared almost 3D with the sparkle in Harry's eyes even more captivating.

"Oh Harry that's fantastic!"

Dan had to suppress his laughter at his wife's reaction, brought about by the anticipation of his sister's face when she laid eyes on this. He was honest enough to acknowledge that Agnes was a stuck-up bitch and her seventeen-year-old daughter was every bit as conceited as her mother.

When they were younger the competitiveness of both girls pushed Hermione even harder in her studies, she had no trouble surpassing the older girl academically, much to the annoyance of Brenda and her mother. Since Hermione started Hogwarts that competitive comparison had been taken away from Emma, who was then left defenceless as she was swamped by tales of Brenda's achievements without being able to reply. Over three years of frustration would be countered by Harry's poster and he almost felt sorry for Agnes, almost.

Colin handed Emma an envelope, "Mrs Granger these are for you"

She opened it to find normal pictures of Harry and Hermione, some he had obviously taken before they got together but even in these you could see how close these two were. One had been posed for in the last few days and with no more than a glance you could feel the connection flowing between Harry and Hermione, Emma was overjoyed. "Colin these are brilliant! A professional photographer would be proud of these, you really are a very talented young man with a camera."

Colin tried not to blush but stood just that little bit straighter at the praise his work received, he gave the pictures of the Champions to Harry whose appreciative low whistle made Colin's day.

The one that Harry liked best was where they tried for a formal pose, standing with arms folded and staring confidently into the camera. Well at least they tried until Harry burst out laughing at the absurdity of the whole thing and set the other three off. The image looked like four friends having fun, comfortable with and enjoying each other's company. This was exactly the image that they wanted to project but Harry would have to check with the other three first.

"Emma's right Colin, your pictures are brilliant. I'll have to talk with the other champions to pick our favourite before sending it of to Xeno. Luna your father will also be getting a cheque to cover him for materials, I never expected anything like this many people to want a poster of me"

Harry had his arms back around Hermione, "I'm sorry love, I never considered how you would feel about this. If this many boys had posters of you on their walls then I wouldn't be too happy, I want you all to myself."

Before Hermione could answer, Luna interrupted, "Oh no Harry, this is only the small amount we've got left to deal with. We've been at it for hours with Sirius and Remus helping as well before they had to go into the castle, they're working on their lessons for Monday."

-oOoOo-

Harry was in his room having just changed into his pyjamas when Hermione entered, "Hermione didn't I just say good night to you? What are you doing here love?"

She came over and sat shyly on the bed beside him, "Harry I really feel we need to talk about us," seeing the panic on his face she quickly reassured him, "No Harry, you're mine and that's not going to be changing. Every time I kiss you, I fall for you a little bit more and that's what we need to talk about. If we don't discuss this I'm going to end up just pouncing on you, I love you so much but have no idea how to control this."

“Hermione I know exactly what you’re talking about and I’ll never push you into something we’re not ready for, we are going to be each others ‘first’ for everything so there is no rush as far as I’m concerned. Looking back I think I’ve loved you since our first meeting on the train, I knew for certain that time you were petrified and I missed you so much. I would rather wait until we’re sure before doing something that we later regret, your smile alone is enough for me Hermione so hugging and kissing feels like heaven, let’s take our time and enjoy where we are now without worrying about how far we should go.”

Hermione leaned in and gently kissed him, “Harry how did I get so lucky?”

“Hermione I have asked myself that question many times since Halloween and I still haven’t come up with an answer, now kiss me and get back to your own room before your parents see you and jump to the wrong conclusions.”

As Hermione happily complied with Harry’s wishes, her father made his way to the room he shared with his wife, tears glistening in his eyes. Dan had caught sight of his daughter entering Harry’s room and was ready to barge in when he heard them talking, he was so glad something made him stay his hand.

Emma was concerned when Dan entered, he was normally very level headed and kept his emotions under control, she wondered what was wrong until he choked out an answer.

“I think we’ve just spent the weekend with our son, all that’s missing is Harry loving golf and the lad would be perfect!”

-oOoOo-

Breakfast in the great hall was taken over by the flock of owls delivering their very precious cargo, Harry’s poster. The squeals of delight that reverberated around the grand room would have had Snape dishing out detentions at a rate only matched by the speed a machine gun spit’s out bullets. Thankfully he was no longer in the

castle and the new head of Slytherin didn't appear to disapprove of witches drooling over posters of his godson.

Sirius and Remus had both called house meetings this morning to introduce themselves to their new charges, Remus had the advantage of teaching most of Gryffindor last year while Sirius was still trying to get used to dealing with crowds again, that and trying to work out how Harry had ever talked him into this in the first place.

Doing so directly after the poster had been delivered was a deliberate ploy, as the whole mood in the hall lifted, Sirius couldn't help but think he needed all the assistance he could get. The marauder was pleased at the number of Slytherin witches who received the poster though only Millicent was openly gazing at her copy, he wondered if this was going to move her crush from Victor to Harry, watching him and Hermione together though had him positive that was going to be an unfulfilled wish, Hermione was clearly the future Mrs Potter.

As Remus headed for the lions den, Sirius envied his friend as he made his way down to the snake pit, Sirius had some ideas that he wanted to put across and things that definitely needed to be said but a lot would depend on how receptive the students were to having a former Gryffindor as head of house.

He entered the packed common room to silence, just what he didn't need, a tough room and him out of practice.

"Ok ladies and gentlemen lets get right down to it, we have six weeks to turn this house around or get out the sorting hat, if anyone would like to transfer to Ravenclaw, Hufflepuff or Gryffindor right now please let me know and we'll save all of us from wasting our time." Sirius realised this was very Gryffindor of him but on a timescale of six weeks there was no room for finesse in the battle for Slytherin hearts and minds, it was shape up or ship out time.

When Sirius had finished explaining what needed to happen he asked if they had any questions, that may have been a mistake as it looked like every hand went up. This was going to take a good while longer than he thought, he just hoped Remus was doing better in Gryffindor.

Remus was greeted like a returning hero, he explained up front that he was a werewolf and what that entailed, "For a couple of days a month I'm pretty unbearable to be around and then on the night of the full moon I drink a potion and sleep on the rug. I will be staying in Harry's accommodation and anyone who needs me while I'm there call for an elf named Dobby, he will contact me immediately."

No Gryffindors had a problem with this and all were looking forward to a history of magic lesson that didn't make them fall asleep.

-oOoOo-

The other champions loved the same picture and so did Xeno, he asked if Penelope could do an interview with them to accompany the picture so it wouldn't just be a repeat of their bio's Luna had written for the poster, all agreed and the print date was set for Saturday. The Quibbler had increased its publication to twice weekly and its circulation was off the chart, well at least off the ones that Xeno had used in the past few years.

The three seekers all went into the training room while Fleur asked if she could use the library, Hermione of course accompanied her.

The three were practicing spells against dummies and Harry was taking some good natured ribbing, "Seriously Harry, I think every witch in the castle has one of your posters, even McGonagall was seen getting a delivery that was suspiciously shaped like all the others."

Victor joined Cedric in teasing the youngest champion, "Fleur said there were quite a few owls entered the Beauxbatons carriage, I dare say Madam Maxime has one as well."

"Oh great!" muttered Harry, "That's all I need, Hagrid thinking I'm trying to poach his girlfriend."

All three laughed at the image of Hagrid challenging Harry to a duel over the fair maiden's hand before Harry reminded them that this time next week it would be their poster up on every one's walls, the girls

would look at the three seekers while the guys would be ogling Fleur with three Quidditch players.

Cedric brought up his only concern with the poster, "Don't you think the Prophet will come after us if we give interviews to the Quibbler?"

"Well they can't come after me because I have sold exclusive rights to the Quibbler until the competition is over. The Prophet can't even print my name never mind my picture."

"I didn't think the Quibbler was wealthy, I'm surprised they could afford you?"

"It wasn't about money Cedric, more about trust. Luna was there when I told you what the first task was but I know that will never make the Quibbler, I trust Luna as a friend and it also blocks the Prophet's lies. I sold my writes for one galleon and it's probably the best deal I've made!"

Victor wasn't sure if it was his ears or his English skills that were letting him down, "You sold exclusive rights for a Galleon?"

"Think of it as protection Victor, only they paid me."

"I can see the benefits Harry and, though I'm not as famous as you two, do you think the Quibbler would offer me the same deal? I really don't want to read in the Prophet that Sprout is having my love child or even worse Trelawney!"

The image of Cedric and Sprout was not one that Harry needed but effectively made his point, Victor apparently agreed. "I too have a problem with newspapers printing what their imagination says about me, if you trust this paper then I also would like the protection."

Harry thought for a moment before answering, "They are still a newspaper and you have to realise that if we do something wrong they will print it. I promise you it will be the truth, not some fantasised version, and you would have the right of reply."

Both nodded but it was Victor who spoke, "I would be very happy with that, even being allowed to choose our own picture today was a new but very good experience. Your young friend is a very talented photographer."

"Ok but I think we should speak to Fleur and see how she feels about this before contacting Barchoke, you are all of age and Luna can sign for the Quibbler so the deal could be done today. The Prophet will have a seizure when it discovers all four champions are unavailable to them."

Fleur was currently chatting away to Hermione with both girls constantly switching languages, thus helping Hermione with her French and Fleur with her English. The two found they had a surprising amount in common, their love of books, music and theatre to name but a few. Hermione knew she shouldn't have been surprised at Fleur's intellect but had fallen into the classic 'dumb blond' trap, Fleur Delacour was definitely blond but certainly no dummy and Hermione felt she could be a great friend.

Fleur was very impressed with this young girl but she should have expected that, anyone who could win the heart of Harry Potter would have to be exceptional. It was unusual for her to be this comfortable with someone, boys usually drooled over her while girls didn't like to be around her because of the drooling boys, none of the other girls got noticed with Fleur there. She smiled while making an observation, "Hermione did you know that every time you mention Harry your whole face just lights up, it is a very beautiful thing to witness. When did you first know that you were in love with him?"

She was trying not to blush, "I liked him since we met but his friend wasn't nice to me, Ron eventually insulted me so badly that I ended up crying in a toilet at Halloween, thinking I was going to return home. A troll was let into the castle by Voldemort and, just my luck, it ended up in the same toilet as me. I thought I was going to die until Harry came crashing through the doors with a look of determination on his face like nothing I've ever seen before, he tried to distract the troll away from me but when that didn't work Harry jumped on it's back."

Fleur was having trouble believing a boy who was only eleven at the time could do such a thing, she had a very high opinion of Harry but it would appear that even that was an underestimation. She could feel the emotion pouring off Hermione as she described the unfolding drama.

“I couldn’t believe it, here was the boy I had been trying to get close to risking his life to save mine, Ron was there too but I only had eyes for Harry. Later that year I almost told him and nearly kissed him as Harry went off to face Voldemort, part of me still wishes I had but I wouldn’t swap what we have now for anything.”

Hermione was starting to get upset, “These girls may have his poster on the wall but to them he’s some mythical figure, not my boyfriend who has a dark wizard determined to kill him. Voldemort is not gone and he won’t quit until one of them is dead.”

Fleur put her arm comfortingly around Hermione, “I think now I begin to understand, Harry is a very powerful wizard who has faced danger, even death on many occasions and you have been right by his side. Even now he still looks to you for guidance and there is no question whose opinion matters the most to him, you are both very lucky to have found someone so special so young.”

Hermione couldn’t agree more but they were interrupted by the boys returning, Fleur liked the idea that no lies would be printed about her so quickly agreed to the Quibbler deal as Dobby was dispatched to speak to Barchoke.

-oOoOo-

All week the castle had been buzzing about how much better Hogwarts was with good teachers in place, Black in Defence, Remus in History and Potions was unrecognisable now that Dumbledore taught it. This did not make Ron Weasley feel any better and he’d just been asked to stay behind by Professor Dumbledore, he didn’t know what he’d done wrong but was about to find out.

“And how are things for you Mr Weasley, how are you coping with your best friends living outside the castle?”

“I don’t have any best friends Professor Dumbledore.”

“Nonsense my boy, of course you do! This little spat will soon blow over then both will realise just how good a friend you’ve been to them in the past, never fear Mr Weasley.”

“Do you really think so sir?”

“Of course I do my boy, Harry has even stopped speaking to me so that demonstrates just how confused he is at the moment. It’s a real pity too because he could have used both our help for the competition, I just hope your brother Charlie doesn’t bring any that are too vicious, poor Harry is so much younger than the other champions.”

“Charlie’s coming here for the competition? That’s great I haven’t seen him in ages, don’t worry sir, his friends look a bit rough but they’re really nice guys.”

Albus was trying to work out whether the boy was playing it cool or was really that stupid, “It wasn’t his friends I was worried about Mr Weasley, though they will be here in their official capacity.”

Ron was bemused, “Official capacity? What’s that professor?”

“Well Ronald my official capacity at Hogwarts is Potions Professor.” He gave a sigh of relief, as the boy’s face clearly displayed that the Knut had finally dropped.

“Oh so Hagrid is finally getting some dragons for Care of Magical Creatures, he will be pleased but since Harry and Hermione stopped taking that course I don’t see how it would help Harry?”

Albus was at a loss to understand how someone who was a walking encyclopaedia on Quidditch and a child prodigy at wizard’s chess could be as thick as Thestral shit about everything else! “You are of course correct Mr Weasley, Mr Potter would have no interest in

learning that your brother Charlie and his colleagues are bringing four dragons to Hogwarts!” Albus watched the boy leave his class while thinking he would have to get Hagrid to warn Harry, telling his large friend not to mention his name would certainly insure Harry knew the information came from Albus Dumbledore.

Ron was sitting inhaling his lunch, thinking that Dumbledore had finally lost the plot when the number four hit home. Hagrid wouldn’t need four dragons for care but there were four tri-wizard champions, the thought of having to face a dragon actually made his fork pause on the way to his mouth, this was not a disaster though as he already had enough food in there to last him for the next five minutes.

The youngest male Weasley now had other questions to answer, “do I tell Harry about the dragons?” and if the answer was yes, ‘how the hell should I go about it?’ He remembered Ginny mentioning that Harry was going to the Grangers for the weekend, why he wanted to spend time with muggles was beyond Ron but this bought him some time to consider the problem.

The speared food resumed its frantic journey into the black hole that began Ron’s digestive system, nothing was that important it couldn’t wait until after lunch.

-oOoOo-

They had finished their lessons for the week and Harry was looking forward to staying at Hermione’s but he could sense something was bothering her, “What is it Hermione, if I’ve done something wrong you’re going to have to tell me, clueless male here remember.”

She smiled before putting her arm around him, “It’s not you Harry, I spoke to mum on the mirrors last night and she told me Aunt Agnes freaked out at your poster, mum wishes she had videoed it.”

“ I thought that’s what she wanted to happen so what’s the problem?”

“The problem is she didn’t believe mum, practically called her a liar, so mum mentioned that we were coming home for the weekend...”

Harry now understood, “So I take it that I’ll be meeting your relatives at some point then? Don’t worry about it love, compared to the Dursleys and Aunt Marge they will be pussy cats.”

Harry couldn’t miss the look of concern on her face, “It’s just that everything I’ve ever had, Brenda wanted it too, I’m sure she’ll be all over you like a rash.”

“Hermione if Fleur can’t tempt me away from you then I highly doubt there’s any reason to worry over this stupid cousin.”

This earned him a kiss, “I’m not worried about you silly, I’m worried about me! If she lays a hand on my man the punch that Malfoy got will seem like a love tap, or maybe I’ll just give her an incredibly bad case of acne, that would probably hurt the vain bitch more.”

“If she lays her hands on me, I’ll deal with it. There is no way I’m putting up with someone I’ve never met pawing me like a piece of meat and won’t be shy about telling her so. If she deliberately sets out to hurt you with her behaviour then I can assure you I will not sit there quietly and let it happen. You, Miss Granger may not be allowed to perform magic out of school but I can, where would you like the first boil to appear, her nose or her chin?”

Hermione drew him into a hug, “I’m not going all possessive Harry, our friends hug and kiss you and it doesn’t bother me in the slightest, even Fleur is now kissing you on the cheek but with Brenda it’s personal with a long history behind it. She’s very competitive but out of meanness, she can’t bear to see me with something she can’t have or get, it’s been like that since I was four. Aunt Agnes just laughed it off as children being children but mum used to get livid.”

“So you won’t mind if I kiss Millicent?”

Hermione burst out laughing, “Oh Harry, you’ll make her year, now if you can get Victor to kiss her to!”

Harry was laughing as well, "Not sure I can manage that but I did promise her so I want to do this before we head to Crawley."

"You do realise every witch in the castle is going to be so jealous of her?" understanding flashed through Hermione, "Oh Harry, that's why you're doing this, Millicent has been teased about her appearance since starting Hogwarts so my betrothed is going to make her the envy of every witch in the castle, if not the country. Come here you!"

Millicent might have to wait a while longer as Harry was currently otherwise engaged for the moment.

-oOoOo-

The Wednesday edition of the Quibbler had slaughtered Dolores Umbridge, it had rubbished her claims of playing any part in the investigation never mind apprehension of Fudge, Malfoy or Crouch Snr. Hundreds of witnesses would swear she wasn't in Hogwarts while patrons of the leaky Caldron were sure she had an extended lunch in the pub that day.

Barty Crouch Jr. was also seen and heard by hundreds of people and now every Quibbler reader since he was on the front page, bound to a chair and being questioned by Amelia Bones.

The paper was calling on ministry curse breakers to thoroughly examine the minister's office to discover if there had been some malicious spell cast that made the occupants lie so blatantly.

It also, due to overwhelming public demand, contained another order form for Potter's poster.

Dolores was desperate for some positive press, that picture of Bones could get the bitch elected to this office if she wanted and Dolores was determined to get a picture like that, which is why the acting minister was currently sitting at the Hogwarts staff table as dinner was being served. She had a few announcements to make but needed the champions here, Dolores thought her luck was finally changing as the four walked in together along with a few others.

Wasting no time she headed for the podium to deliver the announcements she was sure would be well received.

The sickly sweet voice was back in full force, "Hem-hem, could I have your attention please, I am acting minister Umbridge and I have a few announcements I'd like to make regarding the tri-wizard tournament."

It was just as well Dolores didn't have eyes in the back of her head as McGonagall's glare was terrifying, this woman had just appeared, then decided to address her students without even the courtesy to ask for permission. She would be having a chat with the acting minister later!

Dolores carried on regardless, "Tomorrow there will be a 'weighing of the wands' ceremony and pictures taken of our champions, the country is desperate to know them so this will give all of us that opportunity."

"Sorry, but I'm afraid that's just not possible!"

Dolores was shocked to be interrupted and almost let her composure slip when she realised just who had interrupted her, "Mr Potter do you have a problem with that?"

"Apart from the fact that I've made other arrangements for my weekend then yes, I have a contract with the Quibbler that prohibits me appearing in any rival publications."

She gritted her teeth, "Never mind, we still have another three champions..."

Dolores was interrupted again, this time in a Bulgarian accent, "Again you are in error, all four of us have deals with the Quibbler, legally prohibiting any other publication printing stories about us."

"But how are the public going to find out about the tournament?" she demanded.

“Oh that’s easy, we’ve already given interviews and will appear on the front page of tomorrow’s Quibbler.” Dolores couldn’t take her eyes off Potter, the entire hall couldn’t take their eyes off him as he headed directly for the Slytherin table and a certain young witch, “Millicent I promised you a signed poster and here it is, we will be signing no others and this is a thank you for the courage you displayed over the badges incident.” Harry kissed the girl on the cheek while giving her the champion’s poster.

Millicent would put beetroot to shame, her blush was that deep but with trembling arms she unrolled the poster, the sight of the three most gorgeous wizards in the castle had her heart racing but when her eyes caught ‘to Millicent, love from Victor’ she squealed, loudly!

Girls from every corner of the hall descended upon her to gaze at the treasure she held in her hands, Harry’s voice instantly silenced them as they were desperate to hear what he was going to say. “That is tomorrow’s front page of the Quibbler and there’s an order form inside, again all the money is going to charity.”

Dolores was livid, the rug had effectively been pulled from under her but she still had one ace left to play. Not as effective publicity wise but at the moment she would take anything positive she could get, “Hem-hem, you are to be applauded for your initiative and generosity, you four are truly worthy champions.” She almost felt sick saying those words as the bastards had denied her the opportunity of a front page picture with the four champions, her idea of making herself so popular, Bones wouldn’t be able to touch her was disintegrating at a fast rate of knots.

“I feel that it is only fair then that the ministry sponsor a ball on Christmas day, here at Hogwarts in honour of our four champions.” Dolores couldn’t see anyway she could lose with this idea, she also couldn’t see McGonagall now on her feet and ready to let rip, a Bulgarian beat her to it.

“Once more you are in error Madam, all four champions have already made arrangements for the holidays and will not be in Scotland on Christmas day.”

All pretence at congeniality left Dolores Umbridge at that moment, "You all signed a magically binding contract and will do what you're bloody well told!"

"It has already been established beyond any doubt that I did not sign but that fact aside, the contract was to compete in a tournament, not to be rented out like whores for whoever wishes to use us for their own ends. There is no mention of a ball in the rules therefore it needs the agreement of the champions, not their schools, to go ahead. As you have heard we have made our own plans for Christmas and it doesn't include attending your ministry run events."

Albus just couldn't resist trying to play mediator, that and he wanted the boy in the castle over the holidays. "Harry, though not in the rule book this is a tradition of the competition, would you really deprive Miss Granger the chance to attend a Christmas ball?"

"How can something be a tradition when it hasn't happened even in your lifetime? Not much of tradition when it hasn't taken place for a couple of centuries!"

Before Harry lost his temper the hall was treated to the strange sight of Fleur with her arm around Hermione, "Sorry Hermione, Harry wanted to surprise you with our plans. Victor made a promise to the orphans he would visit on Christmas eve so we are all going with presents and the gold from that poster, on Christmas morning we leave Victor's house and arrive at mine. The French Ministry holds a world famous ball every year and we all have invitations, Professor Dumbledore will be able to read about it in the Quibbler as Luna and Colin are also invited." Fleur addressed the acting minister and staff, "This competition is to promote a spirit of cooperation between us and that is exactly what we intend to do, regardless of obstacles placed in our path."

Dolores was now clutching at straws, "Mr Diggory, I notice you haven't said much?"

“Oh please don’t think that I in any way disagree with my friends here, they were doing such a good job I didn’t feel it necessary to add anything more, though they did forget to mention that we will all be spending Boxing Day at my house.”

There was an implied threat in her voice now, “Doesn’t your father work at the ministry?”

“Why yes, we keep telling him to run for the vacant minister of magic position, it’s about time we had somebody honest in that job.”

That final jab was the one that delivered the knock out blow, Dolores was beaten and slinked back to her half eaten dinner. Minerva had sat back down when it became evident the champions had the measure of Madam Umbridge, these four were a powerful force for change in their world. Harry Potter appearing at the French Ministry’s ball after telling the British one to basically make like a turkey and ‘get stuffed’ would send shockwaves through their country. There was no doubt the pictures would again be front page and leave our magical community asking if there government was really so bad that the boy-who-lived would rather go to France.

With the acting minister now heading back to her seat, the attention once more switched back to Millicent, allowing Harry and Hermione to say a few goodbyes and slip quietly out.

“Sorry you heard our plans like that love, I wanted to surprise you after I asked your mum and dad.”

“That’s ok Harry, though I think they had wanted to spend the holidays with us.”

“Oh I’m so glad to hear that since they’re invited to Bulgaria, France and the Diggory’s.”

Harry had just earned another reward kiss so didn’t get to finish telling her that they would all be bringing in the New Year on a private beach in South Australia, he would save that for later.

When the couple got their breath back it was Harry who spoke, "This weekend I get to face your cousin, then next weekend a real dragon, do you think I'll ever be able to be just Harry?"

"Listen Lord Potter, your most important title is my Harry!" Hermione took her betrothed's arm and activated her portkey home.

A/N thanks for reading

Next chapter I publish will be the first task before returning to FG2

Chapter 10

Hermione led Harry by the arm through the French doors and into her home, "Mum, Dad, it's us!"

They walked into the lounge where you could cut the atmosphere with a knife, Harry just assumed that the two strange females present were Hermione's Aunt Agnes and her daughter, Brenda, he was not impressed. In fact his first impression was of his Aunt Petunia and Dudley, their mannerisms and the way Agnes unnecessarily fussed over the girl brought forth memories of Dudley getting his bow tie fixed while waiting on Aunt Marge, if Agnes started spouting baby-talk then Harry was sure he would throw up.

The girl was clearly spoilt rotten while her mother evidently thought the sun shone out of her daughter's backside. Harry and all the Grangers were dressed in casual clothes while this pair looked as if they'd spent the day in the beauty parlour, then got dressed in their best as if ready for a wild night out on the town, it was six o'clock on a Friday in Crawley for Merlin's sake. It was all so bloody fake but what really troubled Harry was the motives behind this display, were they that stupid and shallow that they believed he would dump Hermione after his first glance at Brenda's unwelcome display of cleavage?

Harry hugged Emma then swapped with Hermione to shake Dan's hand before his betrothed handled the introductions, "Harry, this is my Aunt Agnes."

The woman came forward, clearly intending to hug him in a similar fashion to Emma but Harry had no intention of offering any encouragement whatsoever, he stuck his hand straight out in front of him, forcing her to either shake his hand or walk right into it.

Agnes shook it but wasn't pleased, her daughter pouted at the offered hand, "Shaking hands isn't the best way to get to know one another."

Harry shrugged his shoulders, "Fair enough," he turned his back on her to face Hermione, taking both her hands, "Will you show me where my room is love?"

She took him by the arm as they both headed out the lounge, "Back in a few minutes mum!" Hermione was seriously fighting to control her laughter at the expression on Brenda's face.

They had barely entered Harry's room when she spun him round, "You are bloody brilliant!" and proceeded to demonstrate just how brilliant she thought he was, both Harry's arms were around Hermione as they got fully into the kiss when there was a loud gasp from the doorway.

Hermione's first instinct was to pull away but Harry held her tight, finished the kiss and then spoke to the person now standing in the doorway. "Can we help you with something or do you always spy on young couples?"

Brenda was incensed at the snub, her mother had described the poster in great detail to her but she hadn't believed a word until seeing the item for herself today. She'd stared at that poster long and hard as those beautiful green eyes seemed to connect with her soul, making her feel all flushed, here was someone worthy of her who would treat Brenda right. This person wouldn't give her a 'we had a good time but' phone call, the sincerity was there for anyone to see. Then in they walk, arm in arm as bold as brass and he refuses even to hug her, this lord whoever was going to get a piece of her mind.

The sight of her eager beaver cousin wrapped around this boy with their lips locked shocked Brenda to her core, Mother's idea that this is all some con was severely tested by that vision, could Hermione act that well and did they even know she was there? His comments stung like a whip but it would take more than that to tame Brenda, or deflect her from her course, "I just wanted to know why you snubbed me down there, just what lies has the chipmunk been telling you about me?"

Hermione was still in Harry's arms and he felt her cringe at the insult, his temper began to surface, "I have known Hermione for over three years and her honesty is one of her most endearing qualities, I have known you for about three minutes but you seem to think I owe you something and that it's alright to insult my girlfriend in my presence, something I will never allow. I offered you my hand and you refused it,

the snub came from you, yet in some kind of delusional state I'm supposed to have slighted you and it's Hermione's fault?"

The continued sight of bucky beaver wrapped in this boy's arms was really getting on Brenda's tits, how could her cousin possibly pull a guy like this? She changed her angle of attack, "Hermione you should be ashamed of yourself, I expected better from you, in his bedroom as well," the hypocrisy in those words never even scratched Brenda's thick skin though the jealousy did ring out in her voice, "Your parents would be so disappointed in you."

Harry wouldn't let that barb take hold, "I highly doubt it since we were doing nothing that could be considered inappropriate."

Brenda's smile was predatory now, "Ah, but who do you think Uncle Dan will believe, you or me?"

The sound of 'Uncle Dan's' voice coming from directly behind her shocked the girl but not as much as his words, "Actually Brenda, that would be Harry, sorry but I assumed I didn't have to call you Lord Potter in my own house," Dan's wink signalled to them both that he'd heard more of the confrontation than just that last bit and there would be no trouble coming their way from him. His next comment reinforced that belief as Dan twisted the knife in his meddlesome and jealous niece, "You two better freshen up as dinner is about to hit the table, how was the journey down from the castle?"

Harry played right along, "You know we always travel in style Dan and I only use the 'Lord' thing when I need to!"

"Castle?" croaked Brenda.

Hermione had the loving support of the two most important men in her life so it was time to begin laying past ghosts of torment to rest, "Yes Brenda, my school is a castle, well that should more accurately be Harry's school since he owns it. Ready to go down to dinner love?"

As they passed Brenda, her calculator eyes were clearly doing a number on Harry and the figures were adding up rather nicely.

At the table Harry needed no prompting to find himself bracketed by his favourite Granger girls for dinner, much to the consternation of the two women left on the other side of the table.

Agnes couldn't even wait until she'd finished her starter before beginning Hermione's interrogation, "So dear, you'll have to tell me how...Bloody Hell! Hermione Jane Granger, what's that on your finger?"

Hermione had reached for her wine glass, knowing full well they couldn't miss her beautiful betrothal ring, "What this? Oh Harry gave it to me."

Agnes turned on her brother, "Daniel, what have you got to say about this boy giving your daughter a hideously expensive ring?"

Dan was enjoying this almost as much as Emma was, that bitch Brenda calling his Hermione a chipmunk meant the gloves were off today. "Well since he also put a quarter of a million pounds in her bank account I figured he could afford it!"

Emma once more wished for a camera, she would have to speak with Colin about how taking pictures from your memory worked because she would give a year's salary to have a permanent reminder of this. Emma had seen nail varnish on sale called envy green and she would swear both Agnes and Brenda's faces matched the shade exactly.

The smirk on Emma's face couldn't be hidden so Agnes took the only option available to her, "Well since it would appear you have bewitched the three of them what have you got to say for yourself young man?" All three Grangers almost choked at her turn of phrase but Harry wasn't troubled by her glare.

"Nothing!"

Agnes was spluttering while Brenda stared daggers at him, "What do you mean nothing? You are a very rude boy!"

“It was not my intention to be rude, I have nothing to say for myself, hence my answer. Hermione’s mother and father know me and I have answered any question they have asked of me, I have no intention of being interrogated by you or anyone else.”

“I think I’m entitled to ask what your intentions are towards my only niece.”

Harry was quickly coming to dislike this woman so gave her an answer he could be certain was not the one she was searching for. “My intentions towards Hermione are signified by that ring she wears, it’s an old family promise ring that’s part of a set, on her birthday she gets the next one and I speak to Dan.”

Hermione’s scream of “YESSSS!” was right in Harry’s ear as she now had him in a death grip and both of them were in danger of toppling backwards off their chairs until Emma grabbed them both in her arms, halting their backward motion and celebrating right along with them.

Brenda was confused, “What just happened?”

Agnes was not amused, “Hermione is getting engaged on her birthday!”

“What! She’ll only be sixteen, how can she get engaged?”

Harry supplied the answer, “In Scotland you can marry at sixteen but Potter family tradition usually means we’ll wait until she’s seventeen.”

“Nineteenth September on my Seventeenth birthday works for me! Write it in your diary Brenda.”

Even though Hermione’s words couldn’t be faulted, her ‘Write it in your diary Brenda’ was said with such emotion and feeling that Dan had to do a double take, it had somehow sounded exactly like ‘Stick that up your arse Brenda!’ Dan would not have reprimanded Hermione even if she had said it, some retribution was long overdue and with Harry by her side, Hermione apparently could stand up to anything.

Agnes stared at Dan, "And you're ok with this?"

Dan actually had tears in his eyes, "I just wish I had some good champagne in the house, it's not every day a father gets to see his daughter proposed too."

She then pushed it too far by demanding of Harry, "Just what do your parents think of this?"

Hermione almost went for her wand, this was one of the happiest moments of her life and nobody was going to spoil it, or upset Harry, only her mother who was still hugging her daughter prevented Hermione cursing Aunt Agnes.

"I have no idea what my parents think as they were killed when I was just a toddler but how could they fail to love Hermione, my godfather thinks she's the greatest and will be very happy for us. Dan I think you should check the fridge, I'm sure there's some champagne in there."

Emma was biting her lip as Dobby had silently appeared behind the other three and, wearing the biggest smile she'd ever seen, signalled to Harry that the bottles in his hand would find their way into the kitchen, Emma so wished she could hire a house elf!

Harry turned to Hermione, "Sorry love that was not the way I intended to ask you, Sirius explained the significance behind the rings to me the night we got dragged apart for 'chats' and he really does love you, I'm positive my mum and dad would have as well. You seem to be hearing things today rather than us discussing them but that's purely due to circumstances and timing."

"What else happened Harry?" Emma asked.

"Oh they were trying to push a Christmas Ball onto us and we had to reveal our plans before I wanted to."

“You must come to our Christmas Party, everyone will be there!” Agnes spoke as if that statement brokored no argument and their decision was already made for them.

Harry wondered if Agnes was adopted but then thought of his mother’s sister, apparently siblings could be so different, “Everyone might be there but we won’t, our holidays are already organised and all that remains is to inform Emma and Dan that they are most definitely invited to!”

The thought of spending Christmas with Harry and Hermione AND missing Agnes’s dreadful party meant Emma’s answer was always going to be a resounding yes, they knew what they were escaping but, with Agnes sitting there and for the sake of manners she thought she better at least ask what they were letting themselves in for. “What are the plans Harry?”

“We’re all invited to Victor’s in Bulgaria for Christmas Eve with a visit to the orphanage, Christmas Day everyone’s staying with Fleur and there’s a French Government Ball involved, Boxing Day will see us visiting Cedric. After that you’re all in my capable hands which will involve lying on a beach, soaking in some sun.”

Emma paled, “You want us to go onto a beach with Fleur Delacour?”

Harry glanced at Dan for guidance but he only shrugged, when his wife was in a bikini his eyes weren’t wandering anywhere else. “Yes, Hermione and her are becoming good friends, I don’t see the problem Emma?”

“Is there something wrong with this girl Fleur,” Brenda didn’t come right out and say it but her accusation was that there must be if she hung out with Hermione.

Emma’s eyes bored into her niece, “Oh there’s nothing wrong with Fleur and that’s the problem, if you combined Kim Basinger and Jodie Foster you might come close, she’s the most beautiful girl I’ve ever laid eyes on!”

Harry and Dan behaved like clones of each other as they shook their heads and rolled their eyes in perfect unison at Emma's proclamation, both also wisely decided to leave the subject alone, for now.

"Dan I know you wanted to treat us this weekend but I insist on paying in Hamleys, I intend to buy a lot of toys for the kids in Bulgaria..."

Harry was interrupted by the sound of Brenda's chair crashing backwards, hitting the floor as she shot to her feet and began shouting, "Ok too far there, you can switch off the cameras and come out because I'm on to you. I thought you people at Candid Camera were better than this, Bulgarian orphans, French Balls, beaches in December and worse of all, the chipmunk having beautiful friends while getting engaged to a handsome, and of course, rich lord, please? Just how stupid do you think we are? Get those bloody cameras switched off and show yourselves NOW!"

There followed a silence that seemed to last a lifetime, it was eventually broken by Dan but his voice was so low, cold and menacing it was almost unrecognisable, "Agnes if you don't get this spoilt, arrogant little bitch out of my house very quickly then I promise you she's likely to be in serious trouble," the first boil was already starting to appear on Brenda's nose, "We will not be at your party but rather attending a ball in..." he looked to Harry.

"Paris."

"Attending a ball in Paris, do not return to this house until both of you are ready to sincerely apologise to our daughter and her intended, we have nothing further to say to each other."

Agnes merely nodded and stood but Brenda wasn't finished, "Mother you said yourself it was probably a con, surely you don't buy the chipmunk and him..."

The slap ended any more words leaving Brenda's mouth, her mother had actually hit her. "Home – Now!" and the mother dragged her still shocked daughter out the front door, straight into their car.

The remaining silence was broken by Hermione, "How Many?"

"Oh...lots."

"How long?"

"Well...at least until you forgive her."

"Thank you Harry."

The loud pop signified that Dan had found the bottles Dobby had brought, as they toasted the pending engagement their dinner appeared on the table.

"Hermione are you sure we couldn't hire a house elf? Salary can be whatever they want!" Both teens could see Emma was serious.

-oOoOo-

Dan lay in bed with Emma wrapped in his arms, she'd just fell asleep yet was still smiling from the weekend they'd just had. After the Brenda debacle was over they had went on to spend a very pleasant Friday night, Saturday was a day full of revelations. Emma and Hermione had fun getting Harry a full new wardrobe, apart from his school uniform the lad had very little and didn't want Dan to pay for them, he of course ignored this.

It was Harry's face in Hamleys that almost broke the Granger's hearts, even Dan got a little excited entering one of the largest and finest toy stores in the world but you could be forgiven for thinking Harry had came through the looking glass. With wide eyes he went on a buying spree that saw him spend thousands on each of the six floors, arranging for everything to be delivered to Crawley from where Dobby would collect it.

It was only when Emma asked him if he wasn't going a little overboard that the truth came out, "Emma, Hermione gave me a box of chocolate frogs when I was eleven and that was amongst the first

presents I ever received, my relatives sent me fifty pence as a joke because they knew I couldn't spend it. I thought it was normal to get nothing because I was different, I was an orphan. The choice between having gold sitting in my vault or putting smiles on kid's faces at Christmas is not a difficult one for me to make."

Emma swore she wouldn't cry, instead redoubled her efforts in helping Harry spend some of that gold, she recognised that to Harry, making people happy was its own reward and she knew of no one more deserving than this boy who loved her daughter.

Dan was glad they'd taken the train, had they went by car then a detour to number four Privet Drive would have been unavoidable as his wife hated with a passion anyone who was cruel to children. The way she had accepted Harry into their family the Dursleys would have been treated to Emma erupting over their treatment of 'her' boy.

Dobby had been quietly removing their purchases all day so there was no dragging bags from shop to shop but Harry pulled a fast one by arranging through Barchoke for theatre tickets which the little guy delivered.

He shyly handed them to Dan, "I've no idea what this is but hope you like it!"

Squeals of delight from Emma and Hermione confirmed Barchoke knew what he was doing as Dan expressed his worry about getting home at night.

"Dad, you're wearing a portkey on your finger, getting home will be no problem!"

So it was less that twenty minutes after the fantastic show finished, four very happy but very tired people were sitting in the Granger's kitchen enjoying their hot chocolate as much as each other's company. Dan may not be entirely comfortable with the displays of affection Hermione was want to show Harry but he had to admit his daughter was a brighter, happier person with Harry in her life.

Next weekend they would be going to Hogwarts as Harry had to compete in the tournament, they would also get a chance to talk to the other three champions about their trip at Christmas, it was exciting times in the Granger household and both parents were delighted to be part of their daughter's magical life. Putting an eleven-year-old Hermione onto a train bound for Scotland with only letters to tide them over until they saw her again at the holidays was one of the hardest decisions they'd ever made, seeing Hermione so happy was making their choice look like the right one.

The most obvious cloud on the horizon was this tournament, Harry wouldn't tell them what the task entailed, only that he had a plan. If anything happened to Harry it would be Dumbledore who needed a plan, an escape plan from the vengeful Granger girls.

-oOoOo-

Ron had a plan and, to be fair, it was a good plan. In any chess game if you were unsure, the general reply was to move a pawn so that's exactly what Ron was doing, using a pawn. After classes on Monday he pulled his pawn aside, "Ginny I need you to do me a favour," the look in her eyes clearly said Ron was all out of favours with his sister, "Well actually the favour is not for me but Harry."

Ron could see he had her full attention now, "When chatting to Dumbledore last Friday in potions I managed to finesse what the first task will be out of him, if I tell you will you make sure Harry gets the information?"

Her long red hair went everywhere with the speed and ferocity she was nodding her head.

Ron took a deep breath, "Its dragons Ginny, Charlie is bringing four dragons for the champions to face."

Ginny had her mouth open ready to scream when Ron's hand suddenly covered it, "Ginny we need to keep this quiet and you shouting 'dragons' at the top of your voice isn't keeping it quiet."

She glared at him though gave a slight nod of understanding, "If I take my hand away will you promise not to hex me?"

Ginny continued to glare at him, "Ok I'll just have to take my chances." Ron removed his hand and himself off down the corridor as quickly as his long legs would carry him. He needn't have bothered, Ginny was too shocked even to think of a spell, far less cast one. She headed straight for Harry's place.

She found him with Hermione and Luna in their library, Hermione spotted her agitated state immediately, "Ginny what's the problem? Come over and sit with us so we can talk about it."

The red head flopped onto a couch, "I've just had a conversation with Ron, apparently Dumbledore let slip what the first task is..."

"Ginny please stop there," Harry said, "We all know Dumbledore never let anything 'slip' in his life, every move is calculated and this one is intended to have me beholding to him. There is also the fact that Ron accused me of cheating yet is now trying to help me cheat. I will step out there with the same information as the other three champions and hope my plan works, please thank Ron for me but I don't want anything to do with Dumbledore."

Ginny was staring at him in disbelief, "You don't want me to tell you?"

"No Ginny, this has nothing to do with Ron, I just don't want anything from Dumbledore."

She looked to Hermione for help but found none, "Harry's right Ginny, we don't even take potions lessons in the castle anymore to avoid contact with the old goat."

Ginny sighed, "You may be right, I wish I didn't know because I won't sleep the rest of the week now with worry, and I'll say nothing."

Ron was again flummoxed by Harry's reply, it was like being given the answers to a test and deciding not to use them. At least Ginny

said he wasn't angry with him over this, only Dumbledore, but it only added to his problem, when did his life get so complicated.

-oOoOo-

It was Thursday before Hagrid managed to get a hold of Harry as he left the cube, "Harry, Hermione, Wait up, I want a word with yeh." Only half the castle heard him.

He then lowered his voice to a mere shout, "There's somthin' I needs to tell yeh."

"This wouldn't be something that Dumbledore asked you to tell me would it?" asked Harry.

"Naw, Dumbledore even said not tae mention his name when I told yea, I shouldn'ta told yeh that!"

Harry and Hermione were laughing at their large friends attempt to be sneaky, even apart from his size Hagrid could never be a spy, he was the worse liar and secret keeper in the world.

"Hagrid, not that I don't appreciate you wanting to help but I will not accept assistance from Dumbledore, the man crossed the line when he went after Hermione's parents."

They both saw the look of hurt in the large mans eyes so Harry tried to put Hagrid's mind at rest, "Hagrid please don't worry about me, I have a plan based on meeting my first friend and the first person I can remember buying me a present."

Hagrid's hugs made Molly's look as if she wasn't really trying, he walked away from the two crumpled teens, wiping his eyes and blowing his nose.

-oOoOo-

Dumbledore watched Ronald Weasley leave his class and his last chance to influence Harry walked out the door with him, when Hagrid

informed Albus that Harry had seen right through his plan he was amazed. That turned out to be only the tip of the iceberg though as Hagrid didn't appreciate the position that he'd been placed in, Albus had mentioned 'helping Harry' which was all that was needed to get Hagrid on board, now the large man knew he had been used and was not best pleased.

Weasley had eventually figured out the blatant clues Albus gave him last week and again Harry refused his aid, it would appear a touch of 'softening up' was required before the second task.

-oOoOo-

Emma Granger was officially a nervous wreck, she was sitting in this stadium thing looking down into a quarry, she had no idea what was going to happen except that it involved three young people she was quickly becoming friends with and a boy who'd rapidly worked his way into her heart. Oh and it would be extremely dangerous with people having been maimed or killed in the past.

The judges arrived and sat in their own little stand, even though she was a muggle, Emma recognised all of them. Madam Maxine was unmistakable, as was Dumbledore sitting beside her, the witch in the cardigan could be no one else but Umbridge. That meant the fourth judge had to be Karkaroff because she was well acquainted with the figure on the other end. Ludo Bagman had been exposed in the Quibbler as having massive gambling debts, calling into question his honesty and impartiality as a judge since they couldn't be sure which contestant he had placed gold on. Harry had then lobbied to have a representative on the judging panel, for equality with the other champions so Barchoke was now officiating, much to Umbridge's undisguised disgust.

She noticed Hermione slip into the seat they had reserved beside them and pulled her daughter into a comforting hug, "How's Harry?"

"You know Harry mum, he ended up reassuring me! I'm just so worried about this, there are so many things that could go wrong but we just have to hope he's ok."

This is not what Emma wanted to hear, Hermione had been confidant throughout but suddenly seemed worried, Sirius was on Hermione's other side but no help.

"They wouldn't tell us either but we have our suspicions, if we're right you'll soon understand why they wouldn't say anything." Remus was beside Sirius and nodding his agreement.

They were surrounded by Gryffindors and Emma studied them closely, Ginny was pale and sickly - she knew, Colin was actually shaking - he knew, Luna appeared composed but the nib of her quill had been pressed so hard onto the parchment she was prepared to write on, it had pierced right through and the little blond girl hadn't even noticed - she knew.

Emma felt her husband's body go rigid beside her but his 'oh Fuck!' was the real clincher, Dan Granger never swore.

She spun back round to see five men trying to lead the scariest thing she had ever seen into the arena, it was the size of two elephants yet had wings, vicious looking claws and teeth with flames coming out it's mouth, Emma was getting her first close up view of a dragon.

Emma now understood why they hadn't been told, she would have had Harry on the first available plane out the country, never to return. "Harry has to face that?" she asked, needing to have the obvious confirmed.

"No mum, each champion has to face their own dragon, if Harry's luck holds true to form he will get the biggest, meanest dragon known to man." Tears were rolling down her cheeks as she said this causing Emma to snap.

Emma was on her feet shouting at the judges, "Hail Caesar! We who are about to die salute you! Is this really how you people get your jollies, watching teenagers put in situations where one wrong move could lead to their death? Lions not good enough for you lot, it has to be bloody dragons!"

Umbridge was on her feet also, she had wanted her photo taken with the champions but all four had refused and the little shit with the camera said he only took photo's people wanted to see, now some bitch was shouting at her. "Who is this woman?"

It was Albus who answered, "That is the mother of Mr Potter's betrothed."

A muggle? A muggle was shouting at her in front of all these people? "I am the acting minister of magic and you shouldn't even be here, there is no place for you in our world which is ably demonstrated by your outburst here today, apparently they are letting any filth in here now."

Emma was not for backing down, "It's quite easy to see that you are not a mother though, from where I'm standing, that's understandable and not necessarily a bad thing."

The resulting laughter throughout the stadium saw Umbridge reach for her wand, only to be faced with every Gryffindor's and those of quite a few others as well, "What type of school are you running here Dumbledore?"

"You forget madam, I am merely the potion's professor at Hogwarts, Headmistress McGonagall is the person to whom you would need to direct that question."

McGonagall wasn't hard to find, she was on her feet amongst the Gryffindors with her wand pointed right between Dolores Umbridge's eyes.

Not one wand backed Umbridge and the stand-off was broken by Barchoke, his baritone voice ringing out clear enough for most to hear, "There is no rule that says the judges must sit together so, if you will excuse me, I'll go and sit with the other filth!"

Madam Maxime also stood and proclaimed loudly in her accented English, "Sir, if you would offer a lady your arm I would be delighted to accompany you."

Albus looked on in amazement as a goblin led a half-giantess on his arm over to sit with the Gryffindors, the space beside Hagrid rapidly cleared allowing he and Olympe to sit together, the goblin was welcomed to a seat between Remus and Sirius as Ludo tried to get things back on track.

“Welcome everyone to the first task of the tri-wizard tournament where each champion will be tasked with retrieving a golden egg from amongst the clutch each dragon has in its nest. The draw was made earlier and Cedric Diggory will be first, facing a Welsh Green.”

Emma watched Cedric's attempt through her fingers as the lad finally turned a large rock into a Labrador and snatched the egg as the dragon slaughtered the dog, he didn't escape unscathed though as the side of his face had a nasty burn.

She had no idea what score he was awarded as she watched the dragon be moved away and replaced with another one, she was desperate to discover who would be up next.

Fleur was next into the arena and Emma got to see first hand the effects of Veela allure, as she attempted to charm the dragon most of the boys in the stands appeared ready to jump in there and offer themselves as willing sacrifices to allow her safe passage. She noticed Colin was unaffected but that might have been because Luna had her hand on his shoulder and continually speaking to the lad as he took his pictures. Fleur looked to have done it when a burst of flames set her skirt on fire though she calmly sprayed water on it from her wand, Emma would settle for Harry being as lucky.

Unfortunately she had to wait longer as Victor was next, he fired spells at his dragon's eyes that had it thrashing about blind while he dodged tail, teeth and claws to grab his egg.

Silence once more descended over the stadium as Hermione's prediction came true, it took eight dragon handlers to herd the meanest, most terrifying creature she had ever seen, Harry had without question drawn the worst dragon.

She almost passed out and only the fact that Hermione must be feeling worse than her kept the totally out of her depth dentist from running away screaming. The Granger girls clung to each other with Dan and Sirius offering support from either end, Harry entered wearing his skin tight Basilisk armour with Gringotts crest on the chest and 'Potter' across the shoulders. The shoulders were currently hidden by a large cloak similar to the one Hagrid wore, he poked his head around the rocky barrier that protected him from the Horntail and a blast of superheated flame shot in his direction.

He quickly retreated behind the barrier and the flames actually had the rocks glowing red hot, Harry used his wand to levitate one of the biggest towards him then put his plan into operation. Removing a frying pan from his cloak Harry placed it on the red hot rock before retrieving sausages from another pocket and throwing them into the pan, the entire stadium had went so quiet with shock that the sausages could clearly be heard sizzling, that was until Barchoke began roaring with laughter at his champions disregard for the rules, he was taking part and that was all that was required, this was worthy of a goblin. Barchoke noticed that both Dumbledore and Umbridge looked as if they were trying to lay a golden dragon size egg while Karkaroff appeared smug that a rival to his champion was playing the fool.

The marauders thought it was the funniest thing they'd ever seen while Emma was doubled over with laughter, more in relief than anything else as Harry sat in safety while cooking his lunch.

Harry easily picked out Hagrid in the crowd and waved to him before removing a cake from another pocket in the cloak, the significance was not lost on the large wizard who clearly remembered their first meeting. Hagrid was sporting an immense grin but the large witch by his side might have had something to do with that as well.

Harry began levitating the cake towards Hagrid when the dragon's jaws snapped it out of the air, its growls once more silenced the stadium but Harry had understood every word.

“Puny two legs, first they drag us over here, then refuse to feed us and finally cook food right in front of us, listen to your mother my children and learn your lessons well.”

Harry wasn't sure what the hell was going on until Sal informed him that it wasn't only snakes Salazar could converse with, while wearing the ring that signified him as heir of Slytherin he could also talk to dragons.

Using a sonorous charm Harry gave it a try, “Oh great mother, what ails you so?”

“Come forth and let me see thee wizard, though I warn I will attack if you try for my children.”

Harry stepped out and strolled towards the dragon, “Great mother I wish you and your children no harm, like you I am not here of my own free will but rather forced to partake in this farce.” He levitated his sausages towards the dragon's mouth, she accepted them gratefully but they were a mere morsel to the giant beast.

“The one with the long hairy face instructed that we not be fed so that we would defend our eggs more powerfully, he was in error and I really must eat soon.”

Dumbledore's meddling was again hurting someone, it was time for some payback, “Great mother I will free you and lead the way to food, I will summon my broom and take you there.”

“There is no need for a broom but we must have the chains removed.”

You could have heard a pin drop in the arena as no one knew what to make of the scene that was playing out right in front of their eyes, even Ludo Bagman had no words to describe the situation as the boy stood talking to the dragon, Harry switched to English and shouted to Hermione, “I'm fine love and won't be long.”

His spell released the dragon's shackles and the great beast lowered her head as Harry removed his cloak and climbed behind her neck, she launched them into the air before spinning around once more, her vicious tail just missing Dumbledore and ripping the roof off the small stand. She breathed fire over her eggs, protecting them until her return but unfortunately also destroying the golden one that Harry had made no attempt to collect, job done and they were away at speeds that made his Firebolt seem pedestrian.

Emma found her voice, "What the bloody hell just happened?"

Hermione was smiling at her mother, "Harry James Potter happened, now perhaps you'll understand. Dark lords, Basilisks, even dragons can't defeat my Harry, one look into those green eyes and the poor beast never had a chance."

"Oh girl, you got it bad," joked Lavender

Padma agreed, "You'll be announcing the date soon."

Harry was fine so Hermione was happy, "Already set, my seventeenth birthday!" the squeals of the girls only added to the total confusion that reigned inside the stadium.

Abe Dumbledore was in his bar when the ground shook, he looked out the front and saw nothing unusual, when he glanced out his back window Abe discovered he'd been pranked, someone had covered his window in dragon hide.

He was just thinking how expensive a prank this was when he heard the squeal, he opened the door to find that it also was covered in dragon skin. Another squeal and the skin actually moved, moved that is in the way a live dragon would move, straight into the air as Abe looked at the biggest bloody dragon he had ever seen, his gaze lowered to his now empty goat pen. A tearful Abe swore he would be having a few choice words with Albus.

Harry loved flying but this took the experience to a whole different level, he could now understand Hagrid's fascination with these creatures, they were astonishing. For all their speed they were almost

totally silent and Harry could well imagine the first time their prey knew the dragon was even there was as the great jaws closed around it.

“Thank you for the kindness you have shown me and mine today, is there anyway I can repay you?”

“Well anything that embarrasses the on you call long hairy face is good so I’m happy with the way things worked out.”

“Leave it to me young one.” As the dragon started flying really low, the exhilaration had Harry wanting to scream for joy but he had a feeling the dragon wanted stealth.

Emma was searching all around for any sign of Harry when he and the dragon appeared behind Dumbledore and the other two judges. Emma was reminded of a Klingon bird of prey, only without the annoying sound effect as it seemed to materialise out of thin air, just a pity it didn’t have any photon torpedoes.

Harry was proven wrong, by the time the dragons prey knew she was there, all three of them were up to their armpits in dragon shit!

Dolores was trying to clear an area around her face so she could breath when her beady little eyes noticed the boy with the camera clicking away, now the little bastard wants to take my picture! When that picture was published Umbridge would have difficulty getting herself a job as a cleaner at St Mungo’s, far less elected minister.

Harry climbed off when the dragon touched down in the arena as the stadium erupted in applause, the dragon handlers just stood back as the dragon bowed to Harry and walked unaided back to her pen, the handlers tagging on behind with her eggs like bell boys carrying a great lady’s luggage.

Hermione of course reached him first and it was just as well she was wearing jeans, she launched herself at her betrothed and had both legs as well as her two arms around Harry who was now supporting her entire weight as she locked lips with him.

It would appear that as well as talking to snakes and dragons, Harry could also breath through his ears as the kiss seemed to last an eternity. They only broke apart when Madam Pomfrey demanded she be allowed to check Harry was uninjured but his Basilisk armour was so resistant to magic she couldn't get a scan of him.

"Madam Pomfrey I can assure you that Harry is in perfect working order though you may need to have some calming drafts handy with the effect that suit is having on the girls."

"You would be receiving the first dose Miss Granger!" replied Poppy with a smile, Harry Potter avoiding a stay in the infirmary would always put a smile on her face.

They were joined by the other champions and Ludo Bagman, "Lord Potter you received a total of twenty points from two judges but, unfortunately your golden egg was destroyed so you will not have the clue for the next task."

Harry wasn't too bothered, considering the goblins made the eggs and placed the enchantment on them, he also had three people standing beside him with eggs who would gladly tell him the clue.

He could see Emma leaning on Dan and crying tears of relief while Sirius, Remus and Barchoke kept glancing over at the three judges cleaning themselves off and dissolving into fits of laughter. Luna and Colin were delighted and he would bet there was a special edition of the Quibbler planned, Ginny was in much the same state as Emma, having known all week what was coming, she was being comforted by Neville with the twins keeping a careful eye on the situation.

It was another Weasley though who cautiously approached Harry, "Lord Potter sir, what you just did has never been seen by a living soul, there hasn't been a dragon rider in over a millennium and one who can converse is even rarer. I'm authorised to offer you anything if you'll pay a visit to our reserve."

The tough looking red head in front of Harry appeared ready to get down on his knees and worship, "Charlie Weasley?" a confirming nod was all he could manage, "Ok Charlie, for a start it's Harry and I'm sorry but the earliest I could manage would be the summer."

"That would be fine..Harry."

"Ok well I'll let you know my plans through one of your family, would it be alright if Hagrid came as well? I know he'd love to see Norbert again."

"That would be brilliant! I'll wait for word and good luck with the rest of the tournament, I was dreading telling mum that we supplied the dragon that injured Harry Potter but I should have known better."

Karkaroff looked even more incensed when the four champions all left together with Hermione, arms around each other in delight that they had survived pretty much unscathed. Cedric had some of Pomfrey's burn remedy on his face, it would be pink for a few days but nothing permanent would remain.

In the stands a crying Cho Chang watched them leave and reflected on why she wasn't part of that group, she'd been bad mouthing Potter and Cedric had told her to stop, he'd since been proven correct. Then the whole loony thing had blown up in her face and she'd lost her prefect's badge, her nights of being on patrol with Cedric were gone. When he started hanging about with Harry and she'd found out the Veela was there as well, Cho had lost it and handed him an ultimatum, stop going to Harry's or they were over. Now thanks to her insecurities and silly pride all she had was a poster on her wall, she could see how much Cedric had gained from training with the others by his performance today yet she had demanded he give all that up, she was a fool!

The group found Ron Weasley waiting on them as they headed back to Harry's place, "Eh Harry, can I have a word?"

The rest of the group moved to give them some space but Hermione stayed, her arm around Harry's waist. Ron thought this was as good

as he as going to get, "Harry," he said very seriously, "I should have believed you when you told me you didn't enter your name in the goblet, I'm sorry."

Harry's eyes were boring into Ron, making the red head extremely nervous before he spoke, "Fair enough, apology accepted." Ron looked very relieved and happy but Harry wasn't finished, "Now all you have to do is explain why you fired a curse and have been continually sniping at your two best friends since Halloween."

Ron was speechless and just stood there with his mouth going like a cod on the beach, "When you have the answer come and speak to us again." They walked away and left the boy floundering.

"Do you think he'll figure it out?"

"He has to Hermione, we can't live our lives walking on eggshells every time he's near, I will grant you that things have been moving fast around us lately but everyone else has kept up. Things could never go back to the way they were but he could still be our friend."

Hermione squeezed him tighter, "I have no intention of letting things go back to the way they were, I'm very happy as we are."

Harry nodded in agreement, "I can't goof off any more Hermione, Voldemort wants me dead, for whatever reason Dumbledore appears determined to help him so I need to learn as much as I possibly can."

"No Harry, WE need to learn as much as we can!"

They all headed back to Harry's where there was going to be the mother of all parties, even Hermione needed some time off occasionally and was so emotionally wasted after today's events she doubted if she could study anyway.

A/N thanks for reading.

I shall be working on FG2 for the next few weeks.

Can't Have It Both Ways

Disclaimer: Jo Rowling is a professional author who owns Harry Potter, I am just having some fun with her creations.

Chapter 11

Harry found himself with at least one Granger girl on his arm all night, Emma's terror at seeing a real live dragon up close and personal was magnified exponentially by the fact that her boy had to face the nightmare that came equipped with teeth, claws, wings, a wicked spiked tail and combusive halitosis.

His one complaint was in having to listen while discussions took place with Fleur on what style of dress was suitable for the ball they would be attending on Christmas Day, a small price to pay considering he got to spend the evening surrounded by his two favourite women on the planet.

Harry may have stolen his way into Emma's heart but she had totally captured his, he loved Mrs Weasley but had to admit her overbearing attitude and fixation for virtually stuffing food down his throat was a bit hard to take sometimes. Emma was more what he'd imagined his own mother would have been like, as shown in her treatment of both he and Hermione, she'd calmly listened as they'd explained their relationship and accepted him as Harry, the boy who loved her daughter.

He supposed that it shouldn't come as that much of a surprise, considering the only other person to treat him as Harry was the daughter she raised.

Dan surprised himself by being comfortable standing chatting with the group he was in, Sirius, Remus, Barchoke, Amos Diggory and Professor Flitwick was quite an exotic mixture however you looked at it. Yet he was able not only to follow the conversation but actually contribute a few times as well, the subjects covered were certainly a bit different from the usual stuff discussed down the golf club. Though politicians seemed slightly more corrupt in the magical world, this may be in some measure owing to the availability of the media for

purchase to the highest bidder. In his world a corrupt politician would signal a feeding frenzy as the press piranhas all fought for a piece of the offender's political carcass.

The Quibbler printing the truth was a phenomenon that was quickly gaining popularity in the magical world, being able to trust what you read was starting a revolution that was leaving other, less truthful publications gathering dust on the shelves.

Dan understood his wife not letting Harry out of her sight, sitting there helpless while the lad walked out to face a dragon had greatly affected him as well. Emma's comments comparing the event to the Roman Gladiator trials and the images of the emperor giving the 'thumb's up' or the fatal 'thumb's down' was not very far removed from judges awarding points and resonated with quite a number of the spectators.

Amos Diggory was beginning to bend under the friendly pressure of the group who were encouraging him to run for minister, having witnessed the horrendous display of bigotry by Umbridge against Barchoke, Mrs Granger and Madame Maxine to name but a few, he was seeing the magical world through new eyes. His son's friendship with the other three champions had totally confused him, this was supposed to be a competition yet they all cheered for each other. Cedric's explanation had made him even prouder of his son and set him on the course to consider putting his name forward as minister.

"Dad, where would be the honor in winning if I let one of my fellow champions get hurt, or even worse. We all intend to do our best in the competition but feel promoting a spirit of co-operation is more important, the poster of the four champions has raised almost ten times more for charity than the prize money on offer. It must be on almost every young witch or wizard's wall, and that was before we faced the dragons. The good we've already achieved far outweighs the 'eternal glory' promised for winning this tournament."

Filius was really enjoying himself at this large gathering with the only fly in the ointment being the fact that, although the other three houses were well represented, there wasn't a single Ravenclaw present. He couldn't fault Harry for that, rather his own house had badly let

themselves down, the diminutive professor intended to rub their noses in it further by mentioning the magnificent library that was in this dwelling.

He couldn't think of a more fitting punishment for Ravenclaws than that Luna now had access to some of the rarest books in the world while her exhousemates did not. Indeed Harry had promised to let him read a charms book written by Rowena herself, letting that knowledge out might be considered too cruel, but then again maybe not. Perhaps it was the certainty that Filius knew he could never keep such a thing quiet, he would probably talk about nothing else for months!

When people started dancing to their CD player, Harry had a terrifying thought, "Emma, we're all invited to this ball and I've never danced in my life before, what am I going to do?"

"Don't panic Harry, we'll ask Fleur what dances you'll be expected to know and between Dan, Sirius and me we'll teach you what we can. Anything else then I'm sure either Fleur could tutor you both or Barchoke will hire an instructor."

The relief on his face was obvious, "Thanks Emma, I just didn't want to let Hermione down by having to sit there all night like a lemon because I couldn't dance."

Hermione had been returning from starting the CD player and heard Harry's last comment, that he was more concerned about disappointing her than he was facing a Hungarian Horntail almost had her kissing him in front of everyone again. Her parents had made no mention of her sprint into the arena so she wasn't going to remind them as displays of affection didn't get much more public than that one earlier today.

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Albus stepped out of the shower thinking that Harry couldn't have displayed his displeasure with him more publicly than that, he was suddenly sorry he'd cleaned out his ears as a howler from his brother

solved the mystery of exactly where Harry and the dragon had flown off to.

He was dreading the next edition of the Quibbler as Harry was sure to feature heavily as he rode the dragon out of the arena, Albus was equally sure he would also feature though in nothing near as heroic a pose. He could now say from experience it was impossible to strike any pose whatsoever when you were up to your armpits in dragon shit.

-oOoOo-

Dumbledore proved amazingly accurate in his prediction of the Quibbler's special tournament edition content, what he hadn't counted on was the quality of the photographs. Colin, with help from Hermione and Dan, had managed to fit a muggle lens mount onto the front of his magical camera. This allowed him to use a variety of lenses and get close-ups of the action that almost put the reader in the arena with each champion. Instead of the stick figures everyone was expecting you could actually see the determination in Cedric's eyes as he dashed for the golden egg while Harry and the dragon appeared to fly right out the page towards the reader. Combined with Luna's descriptions of the action and short interviews with each champion, this was another giant leap in the Quibbler's drive to become a respected publication as none of their competitors could come anywhere near this content or quality of images.

The old wizard caught a break when the article described how Madame Umbridge had insulted two official delegates and the mother of Lord Potter's betrothed before finding herself submerged in Dragon dung, Colin's picture ensured that this would be everyone's abiding memory of the hateful little woman, putting paid to any political ambition she might have had, Dumbledore and Karkaroff were left to appear as if they had just been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

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Karkaroff was sitting in his private quarters, alone and extremely angry, as if being covered in shit wasn't bad enough, he had to watch as his champion left with the rest of them for a party in that blasted

Potter's place. When he'd tried to reprimand Victor the following day for his behaviour, Drumstrang's star pupil had practically dismissed him and swore to continue not only with his friendships but his visits with Potter as well. Igor was sipping vodka and wondering how he got into this situation when a wand pressed deeply into the nape of his neck, eclipsing all his previous worries in a flash.

"Good evening Igor, you're looking cleaner than the picture in the Quibbler suggested but I would say you're still in the shit! I'm here to extend an invitation from our master who can't wait to renew your acquaintance."

Igor felt his blood turn to ice with the thought of meeting the dark lord again, he recognised the voice behind him and began pleading for his life, "Wormtail, I'm of no use to our master, Potter has altered the castle wards so no one bearing our lord's mark can enter Hogwarts."

"Our Lord is well aware of this, his rage when discovering that Potter had displaced him as the heir of Slytherin knew no bounds, you can and do have access to the grounds and tournament venues, it is here that you can be of some use, this is also the only reason Igor that you're still alive!"

Peter was not exaggerating about Tom's anger, his entire history being printed was exceedingly painful but Potter claiming the heir of Slytherin by right of conquest had almost been the death of the only target Voldemort had available. Peter was still having trouble keeping his arm steady enough to cover Igor which was one of the reasons his wand was digging into his former college's neck, his reflexes were still recovering from his marathon Cruciatus session and this was the only way to keep his wand pointed at the correct place.

Igor was crying now, "Please Peter, we both know I'm a dead man if I appear in front of the master, I can't go back."

"We also both know I'm a dead man if I don't take you back, like you Igor I'm a selfish bastard who will do anything to save his own skin, you either come with me or die where you sit and I'll return with your body, those are the only choices available to you." If nothing else Igor

would at least share in the burden of punishment that their master liked to dispense. He held out the portkey, still with his wand embedded into Igor's neck as the crying man slowly held out his hand to touch the book.

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Luna was fighting to control her emotions, she was barely getting used to having friends so Emma Granger fussing over her as she tried on dresses for the ball was almost a dream come true. Unlike Harry, Luna had plenty of memories of her mother but this was something they'd never gotten to do, Luna Lovegood was not only going to her first ball but had a date as well.

She and Colin had been working closely on the Quibbler and would definitely consider each other friends, when he asked if she would be his date for the ball, Luna could only nod and smile as the lonely little girl crawled even further out her protective shell.

The lilac ballgown she had just put on sparkled as the lights reflected off it, Luna didn't need a mirror to know this was the one, the expressions on Emma's, Fleur's and Hermione's faces told her everything she needed to know. Luna almost floated from the positive emotions being generated inside the room.

"Luna, Colin's eyes will pop out of his head when he sees you in that gown, stunning doesn't begin to do it or you justice!"

"Oh well I better not choose this one then Hermione, otherwise Colin won't be able to take his photographs if his eyes are rolling along the floor!"

The serious way she made that declaration had the three women fooled until Luna had an attack of the giggles and they realised she'd been joking, "Luna Lovegood you have been spending way too much time with Sirius and Remus." Hermione couldn't keep a straight face as she said this and all four ladies burst into fits of laughter, still that was one dress down and only three more to find.

The gentlemen had a much easier time of it, their tuxedos were all being made to measure with Dan, Harry and Colin only needing to tell the tailor what colour their date's would be wearing to add some matching accents. Cedric and Victor were also there but since neither intended taking a date they didn't need that alteration, both had promised Fleur they would be on her arm and dance with her all night if she wanted.

Walking with the pureblood champions along Oxford Street, then down Regent Street (keeping Harry out of Hamleys was an achievement) to Piccadilly Circus was an eye-opener for both wizards. Cedric and Victor had witnessed the spectacle of a hundred thousand wizards who'd attended the Quidditch World Cup and thought that was amazing but Central London on a Saturday blew their minds. Dan told them that Oxford Street alone could see a quarter of a million shoppers before noon on a pre-Christmas Saturday, the idea that seven and a half million people lived in London was beyond their comprehension.

With the numbers of people, vast array of different shops and festive lighting hanging everywhere, both Victor and Cedric were suffering from sensory overload, luckily Barchoke had made a reservation for the party at the Ritz, a five-minute walk yet a world away from the hustle and bustle of Piccadilly Circus. They had plenty of time to relax and enjoy their coffee before being joined by the ladies for dinner, Barchoke had again come through with a box in the Royal Albert Hall for a 'Carols by Candlelight' concert, featuring a full orchestra and three different choirs. Harry and Barchoke had pulled out all the stops to make this day special for his friends.

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That Saturday was also a special day in Privet Drive, for the first time in many years Vernon Dursley couldn't finish his breakfast. The reason was the Surry Comet that was lying on the table in front of him, the Comet was read by everyone who lived on Privet Drive which was why the large man was unable to eat while his wife sat wringing her hands and glancing towards the windows in fear.

The front page story, with picture, was of a local boy who was buying twelve thousand pounds worth of toys from Hamleys for children residing in a Bulgarian orphanage. The boy in question attends an exclusive Scottish boarding school for the gifted and is now only spotted in Little Whining during the summer months. When asked why he was making this gesture, the answer this reporter received showed that the true spirit of Christmas is not only alive and well but breathes in the body of this young man.

“I am an orphan whose parents were murdered when I was a toddler, I understand what it’s like to be alone and unloved. A friend of mine helps at this orphanage so we are going there on Christmas Eve to deliver these toys to the children, my parents were very wealthy and this money has now passed to me. I intend to set up a charitable trust to help children in the same position as I was.”

The picture showed the unmistakable face of Harry Potter shaking the hand of Hamleys store manager in front of a mountain of wrapped parcels outside the Granger’s home, when the store had heard the eventual destination of their products, a hefty discount and free wrapping was provided for this great cause, and source of excellent free publicity.

The entire neighbourhood couldn’t fail to recognise their nephew from the Comet’s front page and the Dursleys were aware it wouldn’t be long before they had to answer questions on the stories concerning Harry that clearly couldn’t be true. By no stretch of the imagination could St. Brutus’ Secure Centre for Incurably Criminal Boys be called an exclusive Scottish school for the gifted, lies were being told and the picture of the boy giving thousands to charity pointed a powerful finger at the Dursleys being the perpetrators.

Petunia had visions of having to move to avoid the scandal, knowing she would be the main topic of the gossip mongers until something juicier came along. Her husband was more focused on the little shit’s wealth, and how to get his hands on it, what neither could know, or even suspect was that this was nothing more than phase one of ‘operation payback’.

Sirius and Remus were intent on making them pay for their treatment of Harry but Emma Granger was vicious when defending her cubs and insisted on drawing out their agony. They were going to pay a piece at a time for the way they treated Harry and when they had nothing left, then she would unleash the marauders on them. Sirius and Remus were happy their earlier opinion had been validated, don't mess with Emma Granger but they were even happier she wasn't mad at them.

The Dursley's woes were only just beginning and continuing with the payback theme, Emma also made sure copies of the paper made their way into Agnes and Brenda's hands.

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In the lead-up to Christmas the ministerial election dominated the front pages as Hogwarts quietly sailed along, Sirius was making a difference in Slytherin as they quickly realised what type of behaviour would no longer be tolerated, being sent to their head of house wasn't the soft option it used to be. Points also had to be earned but with better teachers now in the castle, even the older snakes could see the benefits, especially the ones with exams coming up this year.

That Potter was the Heir of Slytherin yet refused to close down their house without them having a chance to change went a long way to creating the required new atmosphere, that and his friendship with Daphne, Tracy and Millicent. The three girls were constant visitors to the Potter abode and spearheading the movement for changing their house's reputation to one Slytherins could be proud of.

Minerva sat in the headmistress office only when she wasn't teaching, the school was becoming just that, a school. No giant three-headed dogs, Basilisks, Dementors or death eaters in any guises, just a school offering it's students an education which pleased Minerva McGonagall no end.

Things in the Potter residence were also verging on normal, busy but as normal as things ever got for Harry Potter, classes in the castle, tutors in their home, practicing with the other champions and dancing

in the evenings. Without a doubt it was the happiest Harry, Hermione and Luna had been at Hogwarts.

The only time trouble popped its ugly head up it was clobbered quicker than a gopher with a mallet in Hermione's favourite amusement game, hit it! The Prophet was getting desperate so when Amos Diggory decided to stand for Minister of Magic with Arthur Weasley as his running mate the Prophet tried to attack them through the Tri-Wizard Champions. The basis of their entire story was how could people be expected to take a man seriously as a candidate for minister when his own son wouldn't attend a ministry function, instead choosing to attend an event organised by the French ministry.

The next issue of the Quibbler had a picture of Amos and Arthur with their arms around Cedric and Harry, that picture buried the Prophet's story before Luna's interview erected the headstone.

Harry explained exactly what happened, "Madam Umbridge turned up at Hogwarts and announced to us how the champions would be spending their Christmas, without considering we may have made other plans. I've met Mr Diggory on a few occasions and we will all be spending Boxing Day at his house, the Weasleys are probably my favourite magical family and I usually spend at least part of my summer holidays being made very welcome in their home. To suggest any snub from me and my fellow champions is so far from the truth to be ludicrous."

Cedric reiterated Harry's sentiments with his own opinion, "This tournament was conceived with the sole purpose of promoting closer relations between the three schools, as a champion I see that as my main objective and am looking forward to visiting Victor and Fleur's homes before introducing them to mine. I consider myself an ambassador for Hogwarts and intend to represent the school to the best of my abilities, both in the arena and to the world outside."

That ended the ministerial race as a contest and now only the most die-hard Prophet readers believed anything that was written in that paper.

-oOoOo-

Emma and Dan arrived by portkey at Harry's home in the Hogwarts grounds, ready to begin their Christmas holidays. Emma was hoping she never had to return to normal methods of travel as the dentist was getting used to being pampered like this, they didn't even need to bring any luggage as Dobby retrieved anything they wanted before she and Dan had time to realise what they needed.

They would be spending the night here before heading off to Bulgaria in the morning, both expected the place to be quiet since the Hogwarts express had left for London a few hours ago, but that apparently was the signal for an impromptu staff party under the pretence of 'visiting the library'.

With McGonagall and all four heads of house present, as well as a couple of female professors that Dan reckoned Sirius and Remus had invited, Dumbledore must have been one of the few professors left in the castle. After using him to try to force Harry and Hermione apart, Dan couldn't care less if the old bastard choked on his Christmas dinner.

Emma pulled Harry and Hermione to one side for a moment, "Agnes phoned to apologise and would like to meet with us sometime over the holidays, she and Brenda would like to personally say sorry to you both. I told her our itinerary was pretty full but I'll leave the final decision up to you both."

"After we leave here tomorrow our time is pretty much accounted for until the holidays over, our only free time would be tonight." Harry was looking at Hermione as he said this, it was her aunt and cousin and she was the one insulted, it would be her decision.

Hermione bit her lip as she thought it over, "Ok, tomorrow's Christmas Eve so I think we should give Brenda her present early, it must be costing her a fortune in make-up to cover all those giant zits on her face."

Harry kissed her before replying, "I never said they would all be on her face love, poor little Brenda has probably had trouble sitting since that night as well."

Emma burst out laughing as Hermione rewarded her betrothed with a gentle kiss, "You are such a considerate and loving boyfriend Mr Potter that you leave me no option but to keep you around for good!"

Harry continued their banter in the same vein, "That's just fine with me Miss Granger as I have no intention of going anywhere without you."

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Agnes answered the door and got a shock, "Dan, Emma, and you've brought Harry and Hermione along with you." This was spoken loud enough for her daughter to hear and vacate the living room to 'put her face on'. Since Brenda's confrontation with Hermione, her daughter had developed boils that had made her life a misery. Their doctor had suggested it might be a nervous disorder since none of his treatments had helped in the slightest, he recommended getting to the root of whatever caused them to appear in the first place.

For some reason Brenda got it into her head that a kiss from Harry could solve all her problems, getting her a new boyfriend in the process, Agnes wasn't convinced but thought her daughter's plan was harmless and, since it was Christmas couldn't really fail.

They were all sitting chatting to Agnes about their upcoming adventures by the time Brenda made an appearance, she kept her head down as she spoke, "I would like to apologise Hermione for the cruel things I said about you, I was wrong and hope you can forgive me."

Hermione considered her response, "We can all say hateful things when we're angry or jealous but I would hate for that to ruin the relationship that we have so I forgive you."

Agnes visibly relaxed before entering host mode, "Brenda please bring us some drinks, could you give her a hand Harry?"

Harry had been manipulated by masters of the art and this was about as subtle an air raid, squeezing Hermione's hand he decided to

play along. The next few minutes would decide whether Brenda's boils went for a vacation or stayed at home for Christmas.

Brenda busied herself about the kitchen, preparing drinks as she chattered away, "So you really are going to visit a Romanian orphanage and do live in a castle, that must be wonderful. My young cousin is a very lucky girl to find someone as rich and wonderful as you."

Harry felt as if he was in some animated cartoon where she was keeping him occupied until the piano was hoisted into position above his head, he was tempted to look up and really should have.

Brenda then made her move and seemed to shepherd him into the required position before speaking in a breathless voice, "Oh Harry look, we're both standing under the mistletoe, a kiss under it could mean deep romance or lasting friendship. By tradition, a single man can't refuse to administer a kiss when he meets a young lady under it."

Harry smiled, "I believe you're correct so I must do my duty."

Brenda couldn't hide the small smile of triumph as she closed her eyes and tilted her head waiting for her kiss, and she waited, and she waited until Brenda heard the chipmunk sigh 'Oh Harry!' before opening her eyes. Not only was Harry gone but so was her very carefully placed mistletoe, this was quite a puzzle considering it took her fifteen minutes and required a pair of stepladders to hang it up there in the first place, Brenda had no idea what was going on but intended to find out.

She entered the living room to see the chipmunk, lip-locked and wrapped around Harry, under her mysteriously disappearing / reappearing mistletoe.

"Oh Brenda, you've forgotten the drinks," Emma smirked, "We probably don't have time anyway as we'll need to be leaving, we've a very busy day tomorrow."

Dan though added insult to injury, “Emma you know these two are going to be some while yet, I’ll have that drink please Brenda.”

Both parents could hazard a guess at what transpired in the kitchen so understood why the kids were putting on a display for the two now furious ladies, Emma had quite a strong feeling that her niece would be caking on the make-up for a little while longer. Anyone who thought that these two were anything but deeply in love with each other were delusional in the extreme, both Agnes and Brenda were lucky that the kids had kept their retribution at the level it was though any more attempts like ‘help Brenda with the drinks’ could see the whole thing escalate.

Emma was unaware that Harry had spelled the cooker not to work over the Christmas period, Agnes would have a wonderful time trying to prepare everything for her party with only the microwave available!

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Victor was slightly embarrassed about introducing them into his home, having four bedrooms meant that all the guys were going to be in one room for the night while the three girls would also have to share. Harry tried to put his friend at ease, “Victor I was raised in a four bedroom house and my relatives had only one son yet I found myself stuck in a cupboard under the stairs for ten years, believe me when I say sharing with you guys for one night is no hardship!”

Victor’s parents, Kalina and Marko really went out of their way to express Bulgarian hospitality and make them feel welcome, especially Dan and Emma with them being muggles experiencing their first Christmas in the magical world. Marko was very much the adult version of Victor in build, appearance and mannerisms, he even seemed to have the same trademark scowling expression that was transformed as soon as he smiled. Kalina was a dark haired beauty who would appear to be a good few years younger than Marko, her English was also a lot better than the male members of her family.

They all spent the day with Victor as he guided them around his childhood haunts and introduced the people of his village before

returning for a wonderful meal cooked by Kalina, it was then time to wrap up warmly again and head for the orphanage.

You would need a heart of stone not to be moved by the spectacle of Marko Krum dressed as Santa, distributing parcels to every wide eyed orphan in the place. The orphanage governess had been in tears when they arrived with the gifts but had to be helped into a seat as Victor presented her with four thousand galleons.

They spent a few hours playing with the kids and their new toys though Harry couldn't help but notice the children's adulation for Victor, he could have turned up without presents or Santa and they would still have been happy just with the fact that he was here. This was a revelation to Harry who hated his fame with a passion, to see Victor use his to put smiles on these children's faces opened possibilities he'd not thought of before.

Hermione came behind Harry with her arms around him and kissed his neck, "What's the matter love? You look very thoughtful there."

"It may be that I'm not used to seeing people using their fame or power for good, think about it, Voldemort, Dumbledore, Fudge, Malfoy and even Lockhart. They all had something they wanted yet here's Victor giving up his Christmas Eve to put smiles on the faces of these children for no other reason than to see those smiles. It's making me think that perhaps I should be doing more since I have resources Victor doesn't."

Emma had heard everything they had said and found herself hugging both of them, just when she didn't think her opinion of Harry couldn't get any higher, he goes and surprises her again. "Harry, Victor not only has a few years on you but parents who obviously keep his feet on the ground. That you can reach those conclusions at your age while having been raised by those horrible people speaks volumes for your character and leaves me in a state of total amazement."

Harry was blushing red now, "Thanks Emma, are you enjoying your holiday?"

“Harry I feel privileged just to be here, my only problem will be getting out of here without taking a couple of these kids home with me.” Dan had joined them and all three understood her words, if this was something they wanted to do though it wouldn’t be here and now but after many, many hours of discussions by the whole family.

Cedric and Fleur also got to see their friend in a new light, this was not the Victor Krum portrayed in the newspapers, rather a personal view of the young man behind the professional Quidditch player’s mask. Here he was amongst friends and let his guard down, Fleur couldn’t help but think Victor would make a great father some day.

Marko had removed the red suit and white beard from his earlier performance and now stood with his arms around his beloved Kalina, Christmas to the Krums was all about Family and friends. Both had been impressed by their son’s choice of friends and were delighted to see them over the festive season. Harry had already invited them to stay with him for the second task and made the travel arrangements, they were also looking forward to meeting Fleur and Cedric’s parents as well. The revelation that Cedric was the son of the new British Minister for Magic didn’t phase them in the slightest, their guests were so polite and well mannered that it was a pleasure to have them visit here.

Meeting the Grangers was also a pleasant experience for them, instead of looking at the differences amongst the four adults, they had chosen to highlight the similarities as parents. Kalina was quick to notice that Emma already thought of herself as mother to both Harry and Hermione, her husband may be a little behind but was catching up fast and this holiday together would clinch the deal.

Colin was unobtrusively snapping pictures of the entire evening though most of them would be for sharing privately with the group, any that made the Quibbler would do so only with the consent of those involved. They had posed for one formal shot of the gold being handed over to the head of the orphanage by the champions but only after the emotionally overcome governess had a few cups of tea to calm down from the shock. Luna was there with her ever present notebook in her hand, Hermione had introduced her to the aptly named muggle reporter’s pad and she now carried it everywhere.

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Fifteen hundred miles away another wizard had a long white beard and was even wearing red tonight but there all similarities ended, the only Christmas spirit Albus Dumbledore was feeling came from the half empty brandy glass in his hand.

Albus was alone in his room and that's the way it looked like staying for the foreseeable future, with even his brother angry with him there was no one for Albus to pull a cracker with. The staffroom had been buzzing with tales of the party in Harry's dwelling yesterday and rumours of a fantastic library had been confirmed by Minerva and Filius, that he was not welcome there was as painful as his brother's howler.

These current set of circumstances could not be allowed to continue but he was unsure how to alter the situation that he was forced to admit was of his own making.

Albus Dumbledore had made a catastrophic mistake that set all the dominoes falling and he didn't know how to reverse the effect, involving the Grangers had backfired spectacularly with both Harry and Minerva refusing to forgive him for that act.

Swearing he hadn't been involved in Harry's name finding its way into the Goblet had gotten the young man back as at least an ally, only for him to walk straight into a confrontation that Albus had set-up.

The more Albus thought about it, the more it was doomed to failure from the start, instead of trying to get Miss Granger on board he'd alienated the biggest influence in Harry's life and neither one was the forgiving sort. The fact that he was still in the castle didn't really count for anything as both of them wanted nothing to do with Albus Dumbledore and even Hagrid was now avoiding being anywhere near him.

His friendship with the other champions assured that Harry would receive the clue for the second task and his betrothal to Miss Granger removed her as an option for his hostage, they judges may have to

get creative in their choices. This also insured that once again Harry would refuse any help that came his way if it had its origins with Albus, leaving the old wizard with only one card left to play.

He would have to tell Harry about the prophecy and get him back under his tuition so Albus could prepare the young man to face his destiny, Miss Granger and everything else would have to take a back seat until that was accomplished.

The only problem Albus could foresee was that telling the entire truth went against everything he'd done for the past half a century but nothing less would bring about the changes he needed. It would take a lot more brandy and a strong New Year's Resolution before he would be ready to go that far, Albus would wait until after the tournament but could postpone it no longer than that.

Harry may not like it but Albus was sure the sensible young man would make the correct choice and once more place himself under his influence, with that decision made the old wizard finished his brandy and wished himself a Merry Christmas as apparently no one else was going to do it.

A/N Thanks for reading

I have no idea what I'll be posting next, the only thing I'm sure of is that I haven't written one word of it yet.

Chapter 12

The group of champions had agreed amongst themselves that Christmas this year would be about being together, rather than gifts. Each was supplying hospitality for at least part of the holidays and concentrated on gifts for their family though Harry had Dobby bring a case of wine to the Krums', thanking them for their hospitality.

Emma, Hermione and Luna awoke Christmas morning to fabulous jewellery sets that exactly matched their gowns for this evening's ball, necklaces, bracelets, earrings and even a tiara! All three complained about them being far too expensive but when Harry answered that, rather than lying in a vault, they should be worn by beautiful ladies, he received hugs and kisses. Dan received a set of golf clubs with a promise of playing a round in Australia while Colin was delighted but confused with his underwater camera kit.

Luna's gift to Hermione had her in tears which worried the little blond, "Hermione I'm sorry, I thought you would like it."

Luna suddenly had a crying Hermione wrapping her arms around the worried witch, "Luna I love it, these are happy tears because this just bought it all home that it's real."

Luna returned the hug, "I know exactly how you feel Hermione, I find I have to pinch myself a few times every day."

Hermione showed her mother the gift, a book entitled 'Planning your Wedding'. With a look of longing in her eyes Hermione said, "Only six hundred and thirty three days to go but who's counting?"

She felt Harry's arms around her so leant back into him, his whispered "I am!" made her Christmas.

Arriving at the Delacour château a little blond buzz bomb flew past them as if they didn't exist to reach her big sister, it was a smiling Claude Delacour who welcomed them into his home and introduced his wife Apolline.

Harry was immediately concerned for his friend, "Monsieur Delacour I invite you to stay with us for the second task, our residence is considered Goblin territory and your family will be safe there."

"It's Claude Harry, and is there something you're not telling us?"

"The next task involves something that we would sorely miss being taken from us and held hostage at the bottom of a lake, you don't have to be a genius to work out who they will take to be Fleur's hostage." Anyone who saw the two sisters' greeting couldn't argue with that assessment. "I intend to ensure all my friends will be staying there that night, also Victor's family too. I hardly think they could place the minister of magic at the bottom of the lake so we will have to figure out who they will take for Cedric and get them safe also."

Apolline had her hand over her mouth in shock as she watched her two wonderful daughters happily trying to catch up on months of news in the space of minutes, "Oh we were already worried about this task, a Veela's magic is all about air and fire so the first test suited her perfectly. Being underwater will rob Fleur of at least half her magical power, I don't think I could stand knowing both my girls were at the bottom of that lake."

Victor's English was improving but even his accent couldn't disguise the feeling in his words, "Do not worry Madame, we will take care of Fleur. No harm will come to your daughter and no one will be left behind, you have my word."

"And ours!" Cedric figured it was a safe bet answering for Harry as well, since the whole idea was his in the first place.

Apolline from bitter personal experience could easily tell the difference between Veela powered promises and genuine affection offered from friendship, she was now even more delighted that these people would be spending Christmas day with them. As a Veela herself, Apolline was well aware that it was exceedingly difficult to make friends, this competition might actually turn out to be a positive experience as Fleur appeared to have found some really good ones, both male and female.

Christmas dinner was held early at the Delacours' to allow the ladies time to prepare for the ball, Harry again presented a case of wine which received admiration from their knowledgeable hosts, "Harry this is some of the best wine to come out of Australia, how did you get a hold of it?"

"Eh, I own the vineyard sir, that's where we are all going after Boxing Day. It's close enough to Adelaide for the ladies to shop, Dan's going to try to teach us golf and it has its own private beach a ten minute stroll from the house."

This had the entire table excited, all except one but Harry soon fixed that, "Apolline I feel terrible splitting your daughters again after they just got back together, we have plenty of room so Gabrielle is welcome to accompany us."

Fleur got up off her chair and walked around the table, "You are just going to have to excuse me a moment Hermione but this just has to be done!" she leaned down and kissed Harry, "Forget the-boy-who-lived rubbish, you, my Lord Potter are a wonderful wizard who just made two Veela very happy."

"Well 'Harry Potter makes two Veela very happy' is a Daily Prophet headline if ever I heard one," Luna quipped which had Hermione in stitches.

Apolline Delacour had never seen the like, Fleur kissing a young man to express her thanks, him being totally unaffected by her Veela allure and his girlfriend laughing about it. One glance at little Gabi's face and there was no way she could refuse the very generous offer. "That would be fine with us Harry, she has really missed her big sister this term so that sounds wonderful."

Hermione leant over and kissed her betrothed, "You just made someone else's Christmas and managed to amaze me yet again Mr Potter, your dance card is going to be full tonight."

Apolline now understood, the kiss from Hermione affected Harry far more than her eldest daughter's, these two were meant for each other.

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Harry found it easier to dance all night than to listen to the hangers-on that 'simply had to talk to him', he made sure to dance with Emma, Luna, Fleur, Apolline and even Gabrielle, though most of the ball found Hermione in his arms. They had practiced very hard and the results saw the couple twirl confidently across the floor, Hermione was also on the receiving end of some jealous glares from upset young witches who had planned to dance with the-boy-who-lived, they didn't appreciate her hogging the prize all night.

Emma was in her husband's arms as they danced the last waltz together, thinking this had been the best Christmas of their lives. The atmosphere, company and watching Hermione with Harry had made it all simply magical, even with very little visible magic on display. The dress and jewellery made her feel like a Queen and here she was in Paris dancing with her Prince, it was definitely not that old goat's intention that morning he so rudely woke them, but her family were now closer than ever and growing as well. She was too busy enjoying herself to spare a thought for cooker-less Agnes or Brenda's boils, Emma Granger was having a Very Merry Christmas.

Gabrielle Delacour was also having the best day of her life, she was currently sharing the last waltz with Quidditch superstar Victor Krum and was also sharing those jealous girls' stares with Hermione. The champions had stayed inside their group all evening, much to the annoyance of some of the guests. That he was using her as a shield to protect himself from the circling hyenas didn't trouble the little witch in the slightest, she'd danced with the three cutest guys at the ball tonight.

That Victor was currently waltzing with a delightful eight-year-old rather than having some fan girl slobber all over him was a very pleasant change for the shy Bulgarian. He had danced with the female members of their group exclusively and for one of the few

times in his life been able to relax and enjoy himself at a formal function.

Cedric was dancing with Fleur and couldn't remember when he'd last enjoyed himself as much as he had this Christmas, she really was a beautiful person, not just on looks. It made him rethink his previous relationship with Cho and realised it would never have worked. The girl was high maintenance with a jealous streak a mile wide, there would have been tears and tantrums just because he was dancing with Fleur. Cho would never believe that it was just a dance or that they were only friends, Merlin's sake she went mental because he was in the same building as Fleur!

Hermione was younger than Miss Chang but had way more mature an attitude as far as Cedric could see, he'd enjoyed dancing with her earlier and was looking forward to the Grangers visiting at his house tomorrow. They were building friendships here that would last well beyond the tournament and Cedric for one was very happy about that, being the minister's son had also propelled him into the fame bracket. The number of people here who wanted a piece of him was disturbing but still not as bad as it would be back home, that Quibbler deal would really begin paying dividends now.

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The get-together at the Diggorys was altogether more low key, Harry was there in his capacity as Cedric's friend and that was fine by him. With the Weasleys, Bones and Longbottom's also there, it was a chance to relax with friends that they all enjoyed.

Like the Krums and Delacours, the magical guests were amazed by Emma's Polaroid instamatic camera, the photos may not move but watching them develop in front of your eyes was a novelty for the magical people and a sharp reminder of the inventiveness and ingenuity of the non-magical. The oh's and ah's coming from the ladies regarding the ballgowns helped hide a few tears in the corner of eyes that saw some very happy orphans.

Cedric also had a sack of gold for his father, "This is for an orphanage in this country, we presented Claude Delacour with the

same to be donated to a French one. There's four thousand galleons in this sack from the sale of our poster, have you any idea what this will mean to those kids? Perhaps you'll understand now dad, helping those who can't help themselves is far more important to the four of us than winning the tournament."

Amos Diggory may be the minister of magic but the title he was proudest of was that of father, and never more so than just now, "This tournament has been good for you son, you've grown into an outstanding young man."

"I think it's more the company this tournament has me keeping, my eyes are being opened to the wider world that's out there and our responsibilities within it. Watching the Krums help in that orphanage was a revelation for us and I think we all reconsidered how we want to live our lives. The experiences I've shared in these last few months have me questioning everything I've learned, from muggle London to the arrests in the great hall has stood my world on its head."

Amos was intrigued, "Tell me more?"

"There has to be big changes in our world or we simply won't survive, the average wizard or witch doesn't question what they're told, whether by professors, politicians or the newspapers and this has led to us being a society of followers. This may not appear to be a bad thing but when the people doing the telling and leading are corrupt with their own agendas, it leaves our entire society wide open to abuse."

Amos could see the sense in his son's words.

"Dad, we are purebloods and proud of it, but that simple fact of birth doesn't make us better than anyone else, I know this because you taught it to me. There is nothing wrong with coveting respect, honour and power, it's all about how you acquire it and what you do with it that makes the difference. We need to start putting the best people into the right jobs, the clearout at Hogwarts has made an incredible difference to the entire atmosphere inside the castle, it's like a different school and I fear the same thing needs to happen with the

ministry. Having the best minister ever in place is a brilliant start and with Arthur beside you our world has hope for the first time in many years!"

The proud father had his arm around his son's shoulders, "We've already made plans for a ministry wide departmental review which will begin in the New Year, Arthur is heading it with Augusta Longbottom representing the Wizengamot. There will be nothing swept under the carpet this time and the incompetents will be seeking new employment."

Cedric was delighted but had one last piece of advice to offer, "Make it public dad, let the people know what their ministry is doing. This idea that they don't want to know or won't understand is stupid, the ministry controls so much of what we do that everyone should know what's going on inside its walls."

Molly was watching the group of friends interact and could see how close they all were, she was delighted that three of her children were part of the group but it was to the child sitting by himself that her gaze kept returning. Ron's plight had her doing what she swore she wouldn't but she couldn't stand by and watch this any longer, Molly was going to have to do something.

"Ron, is it really that hard to say sorry?"

"Mum, I've said sorry."

This was news to Molly and started her hackles rising, "And what did Harry say to that?"

"Harry said he accepted then walked off and left me standing there to go and party with his new friends." Ron knew he was being economical with the truth but really had no intention of apologising twice, it took a lot for him to say sorry the first time and if they couldn't accept that then why was he bothering with them. What was the point in having friends if you had to say sorry to them every five minutes?

Molly was ready to go barging in there, wand at the ready but she couldn't believe her other children would stand for that behaviour and still remain friends with Harry. Temper held in check, she approached the group, "Harry, could I have a word with you please?"

"Sure Mrs Weasley," Harry made no attempt to move from his friends and noticed Dan and Emma making their way over as well.

Molly really didn't want to have this discussion in front of these people, "Could I have a moment in private please Harry?"

They had all noticed Ron's pathetic attempt to play the injured party by sitting in a corner and glaring at them, Harry had quite enough and it was time to end this, "Mrs Weasley I'm quite sure I know what this is about so it's all right to talk in front of my friends, they witnessed most of this anyway."

Molly gritted her teeth, "Ron claims he apologised to you but that you just walked away from him."

"Indeed Harry did not!" Came quickly and forcibly from Hermione, "I was there and all Ron apologised for was 'not believing' Harry didn't put his name in the goblet."

Harry's comforting arm around his betrothed calmed her down to the point where she could control the compulsion to go over and slap the prat silly, but it was a close thing and Hermione's temper was simmering just below the surface.

"Ron seems to think that one 'sorry' is a universal repair charm for all the trouble he's caused and is trying to paint us as unreasonable. Mrs Weasley, you're from an old pureblood family so let me ask you this question, what is the penalty for firing a curse at the unarmed betrothed to the head of an ancient and noble house?"

Molly's complexion became ghostly pale as Harry continued, "He would at the very least be expelled from Hogwarts and have his wand snapped but we would have settled for an apology. Instead, we got Ron screaming at me that the Burrow would have to be fumigated

since I had stayed there and I would never be welcome again, his rant was loud, in front of the entire school and only ended when Fred and George jumped on him.”

All three of her children were nodding in agreement with that version of events but it was Ginny who felt she had to say something, “Its true mum, I don’t think I’ve ever been so embarrassed by my family but our friends haven’t held it against us. We’ve all tried to speak with him, Percy even sent him a letter but Ron somehow sees himself as the injured party here. None of us can see what the problem is because it’s all in the prat’s head.”

“I’m sorry Harry and both you and Hermione are welcome at the Burrow anytime, I will be having words with Ronald...”

Harry interrupted her before she could get up a proper head of steam, “Please don’t say anything on our account, Ron has had all the opportunities he’s going to get from us. When he can’t understand that firing a curse at his friends is wrong then I’m afraid this is a permanent parting of the ways. He’s had plenty of time to mull it over yet when we think he’s going to come around, the red mist descends once more and Harry Potter is the root of all his troubles. We can’t live our lives worried in case our actions are going to upset Ron Weasley enough to have him draw his wand on us.”

“But Harry, you three have been friends since first year!”

“The reason we became friends is Ron upset Hermione so badly that she was in a toilet crying her eyes out, with no knowledge there was a troll loose in the castle. I won’t tolerate my betrothed being upset like that again, since all Ron does is argue with her then this is probably for the best.”

“I understand Harry and thank you for not including the rest of the Weasleys in the same bracket as Ron.”

Harry was mystified at that remark, “These three are some of my closest friends, why would I dump them because Ron’s a jealous git?”

This earned him a kiss on the cheek from Ginny, throwing down a challenge that could not be ignored by her twin brothers. Harry soon found himself wrapped in the twins arms as they theatrically took turns kissing his cheek. "Oh George, I've just kissed the-boy-who-lived, this means he's got to marry me"

"I kissed him as well Fred but don't mind sharing, that beautiful brunette he's betrothed to might have something to say about that though."

Both twins were then pulled from a laughing Harry by the ears, "Unhand my boy you ruffians, Hermione I thought you said all your friends were nice?"

"Most of them are mum," she giggled.

Fred couldn't resist a parting shot at the playful Emma Granger, "See what she's going to turn into Harry, are you sure you still want to marry Hermione when you could have us?"

It wasn't exactly a difficult choice but Harry's "Oh Hell Yes!" was said with such feeling that both Granger girls couldn't help but love him just a little bit more while everyone else was laughing at the pretend pouts coming from the twins.

Molly quietly retreated as the banter kept going with Dan now pretending being jealous of Harry and his Granger girls, it was a group of friends who were really relaxed in each others company as the focus shifted around the group. Her twins were usually at the centre of it, Ginny was confident enough to participate fully when she could control her laughter but probably the biggest shock to Molly was Luna Lovegood. It was crystal clear that she wasn't on the fringes but very much part of this group, and the strange young girl she remembered was nowhere to be seen.

She could only shake her head in the knowledge that her Ron was part of this and threw it away, Molly was aware he wasn't the brightest of her children but was now dreading his report card, especially without Hermione to help him.

-oOoOo-

Emma placed a few choice Polaroids into an envelope along with the letter to Agnes, Harry had charmed them to lift the curse on Brenda the moment the girl handled them. She was aware that morally, ethically and legally it was wrong to use magic in this way but she justified this to herself, thinking the discomfort her niece must have felt since insulting Hermione was deserved. Seeing Harry with Hermione in that ballgown would also put their noses out of joint, again Emma thought this was more than deserved.

When it came to the Dursleys, Emma had no qualms whatsoever, anyone who could treat a child in that manner lost any and all claims on being shown compassion. Having listened to Harry they had tailored their response to have maximum impact with no sign of magic being detectable. They were not looking to physically harm the Dursleys, rather destroy their cherished reputation in their community, the name Dursley and the word 'normal' wouldn't be used in the same sentence ever again by the time they were finished with them. That would be Harry's revenge, the freak had friends and family that would douse themselves in petrol and follow him through the gates of hell if necessary, hers and Dan's were just the latest two names to be added to the growing list. They would then see how many friends the Dursleys had.

A letter and pictures were also heading in the marauder's direction, it was time to wish the Dursleys a 'Happy New Year!'

Due to the time difference they were leaving at eleven p.m. which would be morning at the vineyard, the plan was to sleep for a few hours and get up in the afternoon to do some exploring. Dobby took both letters away as they made ready to head down-under.

-oOoOo-

Luna and Colin were also sending pictures and stories away to her father, the next issue of the Quibbler should be very interesting. Luna was also very happy that Colin seemed interested in her as a girl, so

far that interest had been curtailed to one kiss on the cheek after the ball but they now held hands at every opportunity.

Colin was a very nice boy who, once he got control of his Harry worship, had become a very good friend. Whether that progressed to boyfriend was something neither of them were in any hurry to find out, both their lives had changed dramatically in the last few months through their friendship with Harry so they were taking this slow.

With all the things happening around them it would be easy to get carried away with a new relationship, both kids were mature enough to realise they weren't mature enough for more than hand-holding yet.

Colin was also aware what Luna's relationship to Harry and Hermione was, anyone hurting Luna would very quickly find themselves in a whole world of trouble. Apart from really liking the girl, she was also effectively his boss's only daughter, this also ensured that they wouldn't be rushing into anything.

-oOoOo-

Petunia could practically hear her neighbours sniggering behind her back, every time that bright orange van, emblazoned with the words 'Dyno-Rod' parked in their driveway. Each time it arrived the jokes got a little ruder, cruder and slightly louder, 'What can you expect with those two hulking brutes in the house? The drains were never built to handle anything that size!'

Since her little Dudders had come home from school, every time one of the men used either lavatory it blocked, and nothing short of calling out the plumbers with their high pressure hoses would shift it.

To the ultra-clean Petunia this embarrassment was reaching the stage where she was sending them both to McDonald's, on the menu was quarter pounders, fries, shakes and shits in their public toilets. She was hoping that when Dudders went back to Smeltings after the holidays their toilet situation would return to normal.

Petunia was so caught up in these thoughts that when returning the clean cutlery to the drawer she never noticed the very large

cockroach until it ran up her arm. Her screams alerted the entire neighbourhood to a new problem at number four, the noise rose in pitch and intensity when all the cockroach's friends and family fled the drawer and scurried across her spotless floor. When the rat poked its head out to discover what all the commotion was about silence suddenly reigned, Petunia hit the floor in a dead faint.

Four hours and umpteen calls to pest exterminators later they were in the car, heading for Marge's, apparently exterminators' took holidays too. Petunia hated Marge's dogs but she would rather sleep in a kennel than a house with cockroaches and rats, and there was now going to be the indignity of another van parked in her driveway. Why they couldn't arrive in a white van that said 'TV Repair' or something was a mystery to her, Petunia would never be able to show her face again if there was a giant rat painted on the side of it.

-oOoOo-

Barchoke was sitting in his office wearing a large smile, Gringotts board meeting had been a lively but overwhelmingly positive affair and he had been invited to attend for the first time. The Potter family had always treated Gringotts and the goblins well, having to watch from afar as the last member of that family was played for a fool didn't sit well with their account manager.

The Tournament had provided the legal loophole to intervene and show the young wizard his true heritage, he had gone to the board with this proposal, citing increased business and getting one over on the ministry for no outlay or risk on their part.

It had narrowly won approval and been an outstanding success, they had a new minister and a new headmistress at Hogwarts, both more willing to work with the goblin nation than their predecessors. The pictures of Harry sporting the goblin crest and a goblin sitting with the young wizard's family had also initiated an upsurge, not only in business but better relations with their customers. The message couldn't be clearer, if Harry thought the goblins were friends, then that was good enough for them, this was the first instance of the wizarding community following Harry's lead.

The business with the Basilisk had earned the bank a fortune and he was currently negotiating with broom manufacturers to supply Hogwarts Quidditch teams, ideally the top four would sponsor a house each with Gringotts covering their costs for the first two years. This should give the companies time to see if the expense involved would be worth the returns generated. Again Gringotts would get the good publicity for brokering the deal and providing the initial finance, the board were delighted with his work.

There had even been a move to have him elected to the board which he had respectfully declined, as the Potter account manager he probably made more gold than a spot on the board would pay and he really enjoyed working with Harry. The next few years were going to be critical for their world and he would have far more sway on events in his current job than any six board members combined. Harry was building a portfolio of loyal friends that were already changing Hogwarts beyond recognition, Barchoke felt honoured to be part of this group who were going to change this world forever.

-oOoOo-

Harry was wakened with the sun shining through Hermione's beautiful brown hair as she rose from the kiss that he thought he'd dreamed, "Time to get up love, this place is beautiful."

"Oh I definitely agree with the beautiful comment," as he pulled her back down for another kiss, one that he was awake for.

"Everyone's waiting for us on the terrace for lunch, I think I'd forgotten what sunshine was?"

"Yeah, Hogwarts in December can be pretty depressing, dark when you get up in the morning and again before classes are finished for the day. I'm so looking forward to lying in the sun beside you."

"That sounds like a plan, but I better get out of here before an angry dentist starts breaking down the door, I only came in to wake you."

“I could stand being wakened like that every day.”

A gentle kiss was placed on his temple, “I’ll see what I can do.”

A terrace the entire length of the ground floor was where Harry found everyone, sitting on wicker chairs and lapping up the sunshine. The terrace gave views down into the valley that was planted with grapevines all the way to the coast, Harry was thinking his information about the beach being ten minutes away must have referred to riding by broom, luckily they had a couple of Toyota land cruisers at their disposal and both adult Grangers could drive.

“Harry, this place is fantastic, how long has your family owned it?” asked Dan.

“Apparently some British people moved here in the eighteen thirties to escape the class and religious oppression back home, a few of my ancestors took a gamble and it paid off big-time, of course they had the advantage of gold and magic to help them along. According to what I can find out from reading some of the stuff Barchoke gave us we also have several properties in the States and Canada that came about by the same method.”

Fleur’s accent always slipped back when she got flustered, and she was good and flustered now, “But Harry how can you have all this, and the fame yet be so... so normal?”

“Why thank you Fleur, the answer is really quite simple, before Halloween I didn’t know about any of this. This place is unquestionably beautiful but the real pleasure is being able to share it with my friends, anyway Hermione fell in love with me while being normal so I’d better not change.”

Hermione drew him into a hug, “Harry, jumping on a mountain troll’s back and sticking your wand up its nose is not considered normal for eleven-year-olds!”

The group started laughing until little Gabrielle nervously asked, “He didn’t really do that did he?”

Her sister was about to reply in the negative when Hermione beat her to it, "I would be dead if he didn't!"

This focused the attention on Harry as the details of that adventure were very scarce, "What? I'd been learning magic for about four weeks and couldn't think of any other way to draw its attention away from Hermione."

"Well it worked and you've had my attention ever since," Hermione gave him a quick kiss before continuing, "Ok we've a lot to live up to after the places we've been staying recently and if lunch doesn't appear soon it will be a black mark from which we might never recover." This had everyone smiling as food began to appear on the tables.

Only Fleur heard her little sister's whispered, "That is the most romantic thing I've ever heard."

Dan had no trouble imagining Harry doing something like that if Hermione was in danger, watching his daughter as the lad faced the dragon was bad enough and he couldn't think about his wife ready to take on the acting minister without chuckling. He would just have to accept that the lad was now part of his family because it was blatantly obvious that both Granger ladies loved the young man, fortunately that wasn't hard to do as Dan couldn't imagine anyone better suited for Hermione. Every father thinks their daughter's a princess but Harry really was a prince amongst men.

-oOoOo-

That night the two Delacour sisters were in their room having a chat, "You've changed Fleur, I can't put my finger on it but you seem more relaxed and definitely happier than I've seen you."

Fleur could only smile at her young sister, "You're right Gabi, I do feel happier than I have in a long time. For the last few years all I could think off was finding my mate and bonding, I let my Veela heritage decide who I was going to be, Hermione showed me it didn't have to be that way. You are still young Gabi but even you must feel the pull

coming from Harry, he has everything a Veela could desire yet his heart belongs totally to another. He disregarded my efforts at entrapment as if I didn't exist yet Hermione's kisses drive him wild. Hermione and Harry made friends with Fleur, not the Veela and have tried to show me that's who I am."

Gabi looked confused so she tried to explain, "Yes I am a Veela but I am also a woman called Fleur Delacour, I want someone to love me for being Fleur, not because I am a Veela. I have some really good friends here who see me as Fleur, will anything romantic come of it? Probably not, but the main thing is to live my life as Fleur, the right man will come along eventually. Meanwhile I get to spend the next week in this paradise with my friends and sister, how could I not be happy?"

Gabi hugged her big sister as the words she'd spoken permeated her brain, don't be ashamed of her Veela heritage but don't let it define who you are. Be Gabrielle Delacour first and foremost and let people accept her as such, she would undoubtedly benefit from observing Fleur with her friends this week and knew her sister would never steer her wrong. It was easy to see her sister was very happy though the company they were keeping would make it difficult to be anything else, Gabi was going to have trouble sleeping tonight from excitement, this holiday was going to be wonderful!

-oOoOo-

Wonderful was the only word Millicent had to describe the pictures in the Quibbler, Hermione looked amazing and Luna dancing with Cedric sent out all kinds of messages. The idea, generated by the Prophet of course, that the Quibbler was anti-ministry was instantly rubbished by the minister's son dancing with the editor's daughter. It also destroyed forever the image of 'loony Lovegood' as the little blond was simply stunning, Millicent would have paid good money to be a fly on Cho Chang's wall when she laid eyes on that picture, the haughty bitch would probably still be crying on the train back to Hogwarts.

Her mum had trouble believing her tales but when Millicent produced her prized possession, the only signed champions poster in existence,

she was as dumbfound as Millicent and made her daughter tell all the stories over again.

Millicent looked up at that poser now and wished with all her heart that the ball had been held in Hogwarts, she could then dream that one of the champions might even ask her for a dance, a girl could only dream!

Millicent had no idea that up in Scotland, a couple of marauders were currently having a discussion with the headmistress that would make the young witch's dreams a reality, Millicent was going to have a Happy New Year!

A/N thanks for reading

Yesterday finally saw a thaw here in Scotland, you have no idea how pleased my little dog was to see some green grass for the first time in a month. I suppose it's hard to lift your leg to do your business when the snow is up to your belly!

My thanks to Alix33 for taking the time to correct my many mistakes in this chapter.

Chapter 13

The next morning, straight after a wonderful breakfast that was again held on the terrace, they all climbed into the Toyota's and followed the track heading for the coast. The 'ten minutes from the beach' actually proved accurate, they just forgot to mention it was by car.

The small private beach gave the impression of everyone's idea of an idyllic tropical hideaway, but given the 'Victorian Britain' makeover. To access the beach, there was a winding wrought iron stairway that led down to a wooden slatted area running the entire two hundred meter length of the beach. The Victorian effect was added to by the brightly painted wooden beach huts, sitting prettily on about a quarter of the small promenade deck.

Dan and Emma immediately fell in love with it, the setting couldn't help but evoke happy memories of childhood holidays spent at British seaside resorts, the main differences being that here they had brilliant sunshine and no donkeys stinking up the beach. British legislation had finally got around to passing laws on this and the 'children's donkey rides on the beach' trade was a respectable one now, that hadn't been the case when they were kids and it wasn't only jellyfish you had to look out for when paddling in the water.

The huts contained everything from loungers and parasols to surf boards and equipment to play games on the beach. With a barbecue, cooker, running water, showers, toilet facilities and food cupboards freshly supplied, the group could spend their entire holiday here.

While Dan and Emma set up some loungers on the pristine sand, Harry emerged from the last hut carrying some hold-alls. Only when he started distributing the bags did their recipients realise they had their name printed on them.

"These are a gift from a grateful Barchoke for the help and respect you've given to, not only their champion, but the goblin nation as a whole."

Inside the bags were suits of custom made basilisk skin armour. "It's going to be bloody freezing in that water and I had discussed with

Hermione buying non-magical wet suits to protect against the cold. These will provide warmth and a lot more besides, anything short of an unforgivable will hardly scratch these.”

Luna could hardly contain her excitement at being included and when she examined her suit, it had the word ‘PRESS’ emblazoned on the back, earning Harry once again a kiss on the cheek from the little blond.

“Should I be getting worried Harry, giving gifts and receiving kisses from other girls. This is getting to be a habit.” The humour in Hermione’s voice had the group chuckling.

“There’s one in there with your name on it too, I just didn’t want you to think there was an option to accompany us on the task. Thanks to Xeno, these two are accredited members of the press, under tournament rules they are permitted to observe. There will again be hundreds of spectators, this time sitting bored out their skulls, watching the surface of the lake for an hour. With Dumbledore the only person who supposedly speaks Mermish, he could say anything and who could dispute it. This way the Quibbler’s top investigative reporting team of Lovegood and Creevey get to tell the world exactly what happens while Rita sulks in the background composing her usual works of fiction.”

Colin realised his Christmas gift would enable him to take the first pictures of the merepeople in their natural environment, “This will be another enormous scoop for the Quibbler.”

“ Yes and for Lovegood and Creevey, we have the perfect opportunity to practice here, with the underwater sights being a lot more colourful than the bottom of the Black Lake in February will be. The sea is warded out to a hundred meters to repel any sharks so it will be perfectly safe.”

“It’s bad enough that you lot have to go but are you sure it’s safe for these two in the Black Lake?” A worried Emma asked.

“They will be perfectly safe as nothing in that lake is going to attack a group of six wizards and witches, trust me when I say we’ll be sticking together, competition be damned.”

“Eh Harry?” Luna held a delicate but deadly goblin made blade in her hand.

“Its part of the suit Luna, there will be a holster for your wand and another that fits your knife, goblins are never without a weapon of some sort. My suit has one at my hip, the small of my back and even a holster for the sword of Gryffindor on my shoulder, the weapons are all charmed invisible when sheathed.”

Cedric was holding an altogether more wicked-looking blade in his hand, “I would hate to meet anything that I would need to use this on. How are they going to breathe underwater? Third years won’t be able to cast a bubble head charm, far less maintain it for an hour.”

Harry put his arm around the girl’s shoulders, causing her to blush, “Our Luna has already solved that problem, thanks to the goblin supplied library. A plant called ‘Gillyweed’ that when eaten will transform you to grow gills, plus webbed feet and hands. Since the magic is in the plant their age doesn’t matter, it will work equally well with Gabrielle or Dan and Emma. Anyone fancy a spot of underwater swimming?”

Dan was staring at Harry in disbelief, “You mean if I eat this plant I can breathe underwater like a fish?”

“For one hour Dan so we all need to stay together in case there is some time discrepancies due to body mass, age or something but it will work.”

The Grangers led the mad rush into the huts to get changed, less than ten minutes later everyone was in the water as Harry was handing out the Gillyweed, one glance at its slimy rat-tail appearance curbed some of the enthusiasm and had one or two doubting if it was worth it.

It was Dan who was brave enough to try it first, "Well it can't possibly taste as bad as Hermione's attempts at making pasta." With a cheeky wink at his daughter, Dan began chewing before grabbing his throat in pain. Feeling the beginning of what Dan assumed were gill slits there, he submerged below the water and was suddenly smiling while giving everyone the thumbs-up sign.

That was the signal for the rest of the group to shut their eyes and stuff it in their mouths, Emma quietly thought that Dan was right, it didn't taste as bad as Hermione's attempts at pasta.

Fleur kept Gabrielle close but they soon found themselves surrounded by their friends, checking that they were ok. They swam around for a while, getting used to the effects and the Grangers also were gently shepherded into the centre of the group.

When they became accustomed to having webbed hands and feet, Harry, Cedric and Victor moved away a little bit to practice casting spells underwater. Colin was putting his new camera through its paces while Luna kept an eye on him.

Fleur was more concerned with getting used to being underwater and maintaining a close watch over her sister than practicing spells so both remained swimming around in the company of the three Grangers.

Hermione thought her parents reminded her of Harry in Hamleys, their exuberance at experiencing magic and what it could do for them was a delight to behold. They swam around like a couple of otter pups, even resorting to playfully chasing fish.

Gabrielle thought she would be terrified underwater but nothing could be further from the truth, with Fleur by her side and Harry, Victor and Cedric only twenty meters away she felt as if cocooned in a warm blanket. Nothing bad could touch her in this company, instead of a dangerous environment this felt like being watched over in her own garden, and what a garden!

The diversity of colours and light could take your breath away, well it would if the Gillyweed hadn't made that function redundant. She

could feel her sister start to relax and enjoy herself but it seemed no time at all before Harry was signalling to everyone that there was ten minutes left so they headed for shallower water.

Hermione caught up with her betrothed because there was something she was dying to try before the Gillyweed wore off, wrapping her self around him she began a kiss that didn't require them to break for oxygen. When the pain in their necks began, neither had any intention of stopping and they broke the surface together, still kissing.

"Now why didn't you think off that Dan?" Emma joked.

"Well I didn't think kissing my daughter like that was appropriate behaviour."

That ended the kiss, "Trust dad to spoil the mood."

"It's that suit you're wearing love, if there was any meremen around I would have had a battle on my hand as they tried to steal you away."

Hermione's legs were wrapped around Harry under the water, allowing both her hands to slip down there while her betrothed supported her. They quickly returned with an evil looking dagger and her wand, "Anyone but you coming near me is in for a shock Mr Potter, I can take care of myself."

That earned her a quick kiss, "Pleased to hear it dear, now lets get something to eat, all that swimming has gave me an appetite."

It was a very happy group of people who made their way up the beach.

-oOoOo-

Dan was immensely relieved, Harry Potter was absolutely and utterly crap at golf!

He'd finally found something that the lad couldn't do effortlessly, here was at least one thing Dan could teach him. It maybe wasn't much in the great scheme of life but Dan was sure if Harry had picked up a three iron and smashed the ball straight for two hundred yards then he would have cried.

It was bloody frustrating trying to be a father figure to a young man that appeared to have all the answers while riding dragons or slaying basilisks in his spare time. This was the first chink in Harry's armour, how was he supposed to mentor someone who could bring down a government or boot his headmaster out his job?

They were on the driving range at the golf club and it was just the two of them, the ladies were shopping and Cedric, Victor and Colin, with no experience of this phenomenon, weren't quick enough with their excuses so got dragged along.

Having a long standing arrangement to break in his new clubs gave Dan the out he needed, of course Harry had agreed to play a round with him which is why they were both on the driving range.

He'd been constantly giving Harry advice and Dan could see that he was becoming frustrated, then Harry took a deep breath, calmed himself, shifted his stance more in line with what he'd been trying to teach him. There was a pause while he became so focused his eyes almost bored holes in the ball. Thwack, Harry hit the ball with the sweet spot of the club and his shot flew straight and true, granted it wasn't a massive distance but if he could repeat that feat with any sort of regularity then he would have conquered the basic swing.

Five of the next six shots were straight with only a slight slice spoiling the run, Dan was beginning to think Harry might be so crap at golf they may have a shot at his club's 'father and son' medal in a few years, "Ok Harry, let's try you on the putting greens before heading out to the course."

-oOoOo-

Harry was lying awake, he'd had such a brilliant day that his mind was struggling to calm down enough to allow sleep. His time on the

golf course with Dan had allowed the two to become closer, the fact that Harry liked and admired Hermione's father might have a lot to do with that. Since after the first morning in McGonagall's office they had been nothing but supportive of him and his relationship with their daughter, this was a totally new experience for Harry and one he found exhilarating. To them he was Harry Potter, Hermione's boyfriend and future member of their family, that was as good as it got in his book.

He heard someone moving about on the terrace and got up to investigate, worried that it was Hermione trying to sneak back into his room. He loved the girl so much and she was quickly wearing down his defences but he wanted to wait until they were ready, not sneak about like thieves in the night.

They'd only been betrothed a couple of months and Harry was worried Hermione kept pushing for this in case he got interested in other girls, nothing could be further from his mind .

Harry had heard boys talk and his fat cousin and his friends even boast about how they treated girls, Harry wanted no part of that. He intended to be with Hermione for the rest of his life so felt no need to rush, he would not bow to peer pressure or let custom dictate when they moved their relationship on. Harry had so little affection in his life that he wanted to savour every morsel before moving on to the next course, Hermione's own self-esteem issues left her worried that Harry didn't want her when every hormone in his body was screaming at him for saying no.

He'd explained his stance and that he wanted another ring on her finger before moving on to that and she'd seemed relieved, both that she now had some sort of time scale and she didn't have to make good on her offer there and then. The snogging session that followed had both of them reconsidering that decision before Harry called it a night, yes he was strong willed but Merlin his betrothed was only minutes away from kissing that resolve goodbye.

Harry had slept in a pair of shorts and pulled a t-shirt on before leaving to investigate, he didn't have to go very far to discover Luna standing on the terrace, leaning on the rail and looking off into the

distance. The moonlight reflected off the tear tracks on her cheeks but the blissful smile she wore belied any hurt.

“Luna, are you ok?”

“Harry I’m so far beyond ok it’s scaring me,” Harry put his arm around her as the young blond rested her head on his chest, he figured she wanted to talk and he was quite happy to listen.

“Today we went shopping and Emma treated me just like a daughter, Hermione is becoming the sister I never had, I was surrounded by friends and holding my boyfriends hand. It was so wonderful and I just don’t ever want it to end, we’ll be heading back to Hogwarts soon but the time I’ve spent here has been the happiest of my life. I know we have to move on but now I’ve experienced this I could never go back to the way my life was before Halloween, it would kill me Harry.”

Harry had both arms around her now and kissed the top of her head, “Luna you will never be alone again and if you’ve room in there for an honorary brother I’d like to apply for the position, I would love a little sis who could keep me on my toes and ensure I don’t muck-up too bad with Hermione.”

Luna’s arms were now around Harry, “I already think of you as my best friend and guardian angel, big brother is not too far a stretch from there.”

“Luna we haven’t thought much beyond this bloody tournament but you can be assured, any plans we have will include you Miss Lovegood, once we finish the last task we can all sit down and weigh up our options.”

Harry could feel the wetness seeping through his shirt as the tears flowed from Luna, she was now looking into his face and beaming a megawatt smile directly at him.

“Thank you Harry, I think I just needed to hear you say that. I feel so much better now that I know I’m going to have sweet dreams tonight.” A kiss on his cheek later and Luna floated off to her room.

As Harry watched her go, he felt another pair of arms encircle him from behind and it was his turn to receive a kiss on the top of his head.

“You Harry Potter are one fine young man, if I was twenty years younger...”

“ You’d be me,” Hermione jokingly interrupted, “Harry this is becoming a habit finding you in girls arms and receiving kisses, even my mother is in on the act here.”

“Well it’s your own fault for choosing such a charming gentleman,” Emma joked right back.

Harry embarrassingly asked, “Eh how long were you two standing there?”

She gently kissed the boy who was still held in her mother’s arms, “Long enough Mr Potter, if you don’t mind mother I would like to tuck my betrothed into bed before any other females get ideas that he’s available.”

Emma chuckled, “Just don’t take all night dear.”

Hermione led him into his room before speaking quietly, she definitely didn’t want to be overheard, “Harry I now understand why you want to wait and I’m happy with that, but there are other ways we can take our relationship forward.”

Hermione now had Harry’s full attention, “Like what love?”

“Well I’ve been doing some reading...”

The smiles on their faces at breakfast indicted that must have been a good book Hermione read.

Fleur and Gabrielle were also lying awake and, with their windows open had overheard the entire incident out on the terrace.

Gabi had a question for her big sister, "Fleur are all the boys like Harry?"

It may be dark but Fleur's rueful smile was there none the less, "Unfortunately not, boys like Harry Potter are very rare and if you ever find one Gabi, grab hold of him and don't let go."

"What about Victor and Cedric?"

"Oh those two are very nice as well."

This seemed to make up Gabrielle's mind, "Ok you take one and I'll have the other, you're the oldest so it's only fair you get first pick."

Fleur was trying not to laugh at her serious little sister, "It doesn't work that way Gabi, neither they nor us are possessions to be owned. Harry and Hermione have shown me the difference and I want what they've got, I want a husband who will love Fleur Delacour, not a Veela. I like both those boys but they're my friends, maybe in a while that will change but I don't think so, we will always be good friends but nothing more than that."

Gabrielle looked confused, "But how are you going to find such a man?"

Fleur laughed, "I have a plan, Harry only hangs about with nice people, if I stay close then I'm sure to meet someone."

"Do you think Harry would mind if I stayed close as well?"

"I'm sure Harry would like that," she decided to tease a little, "I understand that Colin has a younger brother?"

“Eh no thanks sis, I like Colin and he’s nice enough but I ...” Her sister’s giggling gave the game away and saw Gabrielle’s pillow heading at speed in her direction.

-oOoOo-

They entered the great hall as a group, a bit weary as they were still adjusting to the time difference but fully refreshed after their break. Even saying goodbye to Gabi wasn’t that bad as she would be coming to stay with them in seven weeks for the second task.

Australia had been wonderful and a much needed break, the only incident of any concern was sitting in a restaurant where you could see into the kitchen and spying a chef who looked remarkably like Severus Snape. They couldn’t be certain as any trade mark greasy hair would have been inside his white hat, he was dressed from head to toe in the same colour and his chef’s outfit definitely hadn’t the capabilities to billow like robes as he moved. Just the thought of a Snape look-alike was enough to destroy their appetite and ensure they left the restaurant quickly, without eating or drinking anything .

They sat together as a group at the end of the Gryffindor table, greeting friends before McGonagall stood to make an announcement before the welcoming feast.

“I would like to bid you all welcome to a new year at Hogwarts and make an announcement, inspired by pictures of our Champions enjoying themselves over the festive season. They have shown a willingness to learn from each other that should be an inspiration to us all. With that in mind a decision was made to show some real Scottish hospitality to our guests, not only from France and Bulgaria, but England, Ireland and Wales as well. Hogwarts will be hosting a Ceilidh here in the great hall on the Saturday before Burns Night, there will be a traditional supper followed by dancing to a Ceilidh band until midnight. All students forth year and above are welcome to attend, younger students may be asked as dates by those of age. I look forward to seeing everyone there.”

This was like a bolt out the blue and more than a few sets of eyes turned to Hermione for an explanation, she of course was happy to provide one. "A Ceilidh is Scottish country dancing and a great idea for bringing down barriers as lots of the dances are reels where half of you move on to the next group as part of the dance. Haggis is wonderful, just eat it and never ask what's in it!"

Cedric was quick on the uptake and wanted everyone to attend, "Luna would you do me the honour of accompanying me to the Ceilidh?"

Fleur was also no slouch, "Colin I would be honoured to go with you, thank you so much for asking."

Victor was about to ask Ginny, ensuring that the younger girl could attend when Neville beat him to it. This left him in a bit of a bind when he thought, what would Harry do? The answer came to him instantly and it was a smiling Victor Krum who got to his feet and headed for the Slytherin table.

Millie was aware that all talking had stopped around her but it wasn't until she turned around from speaking with Tracy about the dance that she discovered the reason why, Victor Krum was standing there smiling at her.

"Miss Bulstrode, would you do me the honour of accompanying me to the Ceilidh?" His smile made her knees wobble, "I have to warn you though Millicent I know none of these dances so you are going to have to teach me."

She was amazed how composed she felt on the outside because her innards were dancing 'the dashing white sergeant' "I would like that very much Victor and look forward to the dancing lessons."

With another smile and a slight bow, he returned to the Gryffindor table, leaving Millie thinking her mum would never believe her.

Hermione was just putting the mirror away after contacting her mum for emergency dance lessons when a thought struck her, "Harry,

McGonagall is going all out to be hospitable here, how about we return the favour?"

Harry's blank expression had her continuing, "I think you gentlemen would all look so sexy in kilts, while we ladies wear dresses with matching tartan sashes, what do you think?"

Harry had a twinkle in his eye, "Do we include professors Moony and Padfoot as gentlemen?"

Hermione was giggling now, "Not usually but in this case that's a definite yes! It would be worth it just to see Sirius in a kilt."

Ginny was the only one to pour cold water on the idea, "Do you really want to turn the twins loose in Hogwarts wearing kilts? Merlin knows what they could fit in their sporrans!"

This had the effect of cracking everyone up, except Victor. "Eh what's a kilt and a sporran sounds painful?"

The laughter emanating from the Gryffindor table was infectious, everyone was feeling good and looking forward to the surprise event.

Only Cho Chang had a face like a wet fish, Cedric sitting beside the Veela was bad enough but then to ask loony to the Ceilidh was just being spiteful as far as she was concerned. She didn't know that a man with a long white beard thought so to, and because of this there would be plenty wet fish in her future.

Albus was delighted with the announcement of the dance, he had of course already chosen the Hogwarts pair's hostages, this gave him the chance to observe the other two. It was blatantly obvious why the French Veela asked Mr Creevey so he would have to closely observe her on the night and see who she danced with, it appeared though that Mr Krum's choice was already made.

Albus could see their unity making a mockery of the tournament but had something up his sleeve for the next task to ensure that didn't happen, he was after all still the greatest wizard alive.

Ron Weasley sat oblivious to all the merriment that surrounded him, his entire concentration was focused on doing justice to the feast presented here. He missed Dean and Seamus asking Lavender and Parvati to the dance, his brothers and Lee asking the three Gryffindor chasers also went unnoticed. The only legs and breasts he was interested in at the moment currently had succulent juices running out of them and went great with roast potatoes, he reached out for his third helping of chicken.

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Their plan with Sirius backfired as, not only did he love the idea of kilts but insisted on making all the arrangements as well as paying for them. Citing that his family fortune had sat there growing while he was in Azkaban and the ministry were now offering him compensation as well so he was due a spending spree.

A Hogsmead weekend had been announced to allow some preparation and Sirius had booked the entire tribe into a kilt makers in Edinburgh on the Saturday, that famous city wouldn't know what hit it!

They had acquired a tartan catalogue from the shop and Sirius was delighted to discover there was a Black clan tartan so his decision was easy, Tracy and Daphne wanted to honour the head who'd saved their house so their dates, Blaise and Theodore would be wearing Black tartan kilts.

Of the Hufflepuff contingent only Susan's date Ernie had a clan tartan, it was even in their house colours so the four puffs would be wearing Macmillan tartan

Remus also loved the kilt idea but chose McGonagall tartan to honour the woman who'd been his head of house for seven years and actually gave a werewolf a prefect's badge. Remus still had it and it was amongst his most prized possessions, he still considered receiving that badge as one of his best ever days. The other Gryffindors thought his kilt was a great idea and all decided to wear the same, all except Colin since his 'date' was a champion.

Harry never expected there to be a Potter tartan but the name he did see there surprised him, he also thought it would be entirely fitting. "Hermione, do you think your dad would mind if we wore the Granger clan tartan?"

Hermione's eyes glistened with moisture as she answered her betrothed, "Harry I think he would love it!" She then proceeded to give him one of her special reward kisses.

While they were otherwise occupied the rest of the group thought this was a brilliant idea and agreed, especially when Millicent noticed the tartan base colour was green. The four champions and their dates would be dressed like muggles, in a design that honoured the non-magical parents of one of their best friends. Not only were they pleased with the message of unity that presented but all genuinely liked Dan and Emma, they were after all going to be teaching them how to dance at a Ceilidh.

The twins absolutely loved the dancing, their natural exuberance was perfect for this most social of dancing events. Dancing as part of their group when performing 'Strip the Willow' was almost dangerous, they could see any group with Hagrid and Madame Maxime being a hoot.

When they all attended there were fourteen couples and they were able to hold their own mini Ceilidh in the training room with the CD player. Emma and Dan taught them the basics before introducing the concept of progressing to the next group, no one thought Hogwarts was quite ready for the ladies moving from partner to partner, they were close but did not want to tempt fate yet.

Minerva and Filius watched one night and the Grangers were approached about teaching a few classes in the castle, when she discovered Dan was something of a Burns aficionado, she immediately invited him to offer 'Address to a Haggis'.

Even without the whole magical background Dan Granger understood what an honour this was, he'd never even been asked to do this at his golf club's Burns Suppers, another two names were added to the Edinburgh shopping trip on Saturday.

Filius was delighted, he'd originally been earmarked to perform that poem but this now freed him to give a rendition of his favourite, Tam O'Shanter. What disappointed him was the continual lack of Ravenclaws in this company, though with Miss Chang's latest stunt he couldn't see that changing anytime soon.

Flashback –

She spied her enemy walking along the corridor, this was her chance at some revenge. "Hey loony, you do know Cedric only asked you to the dance because you wouldn't be able to go otherwise?"

Luna had a genuine confused expression on her face, "Since Cedric is my friend and he knows that Colin is my boyfriend I would say that you're correct. We will accompany Cedric and Fleur and, as usual, be in their company for the entire night, it's just a way for us to attend."

Mentioning Fleur and Cedric in the same sentence was too much for Cho, "That bastard Veela got her hooks into my boyfriend, how can any witch compete with her allure?"

"Fleur is my friend and has only ever used her allure once that I'm aware of, it was against Harry and had no effect, she has of course since apologised."

Cho was incensed, was this little tramp insinuating she couldn't hold on to her wizard? "Your loony Lovegood, you don't have any friends, they only use you because your daddy owns that stupid newspaper."

"I shall go to the dance with my friends and boyfriend and have a great time, what will you be doing Cho?"

"Why you..." Cho's rant and reach for her wand halted the second Luna's was pointed right between her eyes.

"I live with two professors, have private tutors and access to a library you wouldn't believe. I also train every day with four champions and I'm confident I can kick your jealous arse up and

down this corridor, do you want to see if I'm right?" Cho now realised this was a whole new version of loony she was dealing with.

"Where are your friends Cho? Did they finally get fed-up with your constant bitching or grow-up enough to know that bullying is wrong?"

"I don't see any of your so-called friends here either loony."

"Oh you don't have to worry about that, we've always got Luna's back covered." Harry, Hermione, Cedric and Colin walked round the corner from where they had obviously been listening.

Colin walked towards his girlfriend and slowly lowered her wand by gently placing his hand on hers, "Luna, don't do this, you're worth ten of her."

The real kicker though was when Cedric looked his ex-girlfriend up and down before adding, "Colin I think you're underestimating Luna there."

This was too much for Cho who burst into tears and raced along the corridor, straight into Flitwick who'd also been monitoring the situation. "Is everything all right Miss Lovegood?"

Luna's wand was back up her sleeve in its holster while Colin held her hand, "Oh yes professor, everything's fine."

End Flashback –

Filius had yet to decide if it would be more of a punishment to make Miss Chang attend or confine her to the dorm, he could make strong arguments for both.

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Dumbledore's nose was seriously out of joint, he thought his robes were splendid but the sight of the couples marching in, boys with swirling kilts and the girls in pastel coloured dresses with matching tartan sashes stole the entire evening. They were using house tables

for the first part of the evening and only Ravenclaw didn't have anyone in a kilt. The champion's party were bedecked in green tartan and actually sat at the Slytherin table, much to the delight of Miss Bulstrode.

Minerva's eyes were filling up at the stirring sight of so many Gryffindors in McGonagall tartan, she stood to begin the evening. "Welcome everyone, as is tradition we will begin with the piping in of the haggis. Our night will consist of much dancing but with breaks for poetry and songs, celebrating the works of Robert Burns. Let the evening commence."

At that the doors opened and a piper led four elves who carried an enormous silver salver, containing a haggis nearly the size of them. The bagpipes stirringly reverberated off the walls as the procession made its way to the top table, the salver was levitated right onto the table in front of Dan.

Those who knew him could tell he was nervous but the rest of the hall thought he was fantastic, they all at least recognised the Grangers from the dance lessons held in this very hall.

To be honest Dan had lost them by the time he got to 'Great chieftain o the puddin'-race!' but the drama he lent to his performance brought them back. When he plunged the dagger into the haggis, the hall was hanging on his every word, even though they only understood about one in four.

After they had eaten Professor Flitwick's rendition of 'Tam O'Shanter' had them hooting with laughter and cheering as Tam and Meg made it over the bridge. He got a standing ovation when he finished, his voices and actions describing the poem more than the unfamiliar words.

The tables were cleared as the band started, everyone wearing a kilt immediately headed for the dance floor with their partner in tow. McGonagall found herself dancing with Remus and six Gryffindors in an eightsome reel, even Lee Jordan's dreadlocks didn't look out of place with him clad in his kilt and waistcoat.

The four champions and their dates formed their own reel and were soon spinning and twirling away, when the band announced the next dance was 'Strip the Willow' the twins shouts of joy could be heard above everyone else. The night had gotten off to a flier and looked all set to continue that way.

The small breaks for some poetry reading were welcome as it gave everyone a chance for a rest and to take on some much needed refreshments. Remus gave a powerful, heartfelt rendition of 'A man's a man for a' that' and had every single person in the hall wondering if Burns was a wizard. Witches, Warlocks and now a poem about equality read by a man who'd been discriminated against his whole life, it was stirring stuff.

The mood immediately lifted again as the band announced the next dance as the 'Gay Gordons'.

At the next break they were standing chatting to her parents when Hermione was sure Harry's name was announced, she turned to her betrothed who handed her a long-stemmed red rose before walking to the stage. Just when she thought Harry couldn't surprise her any more he pulls a stunt like this, her mum raised a questioning eyebrow but she could only shrug, the only one who knew what was happening next was Harry.

He looked so handsome on the stage in his kilt that her heart melted, that was until he began to sing and her whole body turned to mush. In her totally unbiased opinion she thought Harry was utterly brilliant!

O, my luve is like a red, red rose,
That's newly sprung in June.
O, my luve is like a melodie,
That's sweetly play'd in tune.

As fair art thou, my bonie lass,
So deep in luve am I,
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
Till a' the seas gang dry.

Till a' the seas gang dry, my dear,

And the rocks melt wi the sun!
And I will luve thee still, my dear,
While the sands o life shall run.

And fare thee weel, my only luve!
And fare thee weel, a while!
And I will come again, my luve,
Tho it were ten thousand mile!

Hermione slowly walked towards the stage as he finished singing,
“Harry that was beautiful!”

“It needed to be, I was singing it for you.” As they kissed the entire hall cheered themselves hoarse. This was a night that would be talked about for years to come, and repeated if Minerva McGonagall had anything to do with it.

Albus was left just having to choose someone for the Veela, she was very close to her group but appeared closest to the other champions and Miss Granger. He thought this type of dancing uncouth and not fit for wizarding society, if he didn't do something soon the great hall would end up getting transformed into a discothèque.

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Igor Karkaroff sat alone on his ship sipping whisky, the vodka available in this country didn't deserve the name and he'd already drank all the supplies he'd brought with him, being dragged in front of the dark lord would drive anyone to drink.

The strains of 'Auld Lang Syne' filtered down from the castle and alerted him that the Ceilidh was ending. His students would soon be returning and Igor couldn't help but think that his master didn't hand out any cups of kindness.

The task he'd been given would probably see his life ended, if it was successful he would be the prime suspect and rapidly arrested; if it failed then the dark lord would kill him. Igor wasn't aware of the muggle saying 'between a rock and a hard place' but certainly understood the feeling.

The scotch certainly tasted beautiful but that was not what he required tonight, oblivion from his troubles was his aim and for that his normal vodka was decidedly quicker. It was only four weeks to the second task and, barring a miracle, that was his life expectancy. Igor refilled his glass from the almost empty bottle.

A/N Thanks for reading

I wanted to have a function in Hogwarts before the second task and my choice was this or Valentines Day. Since Hogwarts is in Scotland, (despite the number of fics that have it in England) and now with a Scottish headmistress I think McGonagall would go with the option of displaying some highland hospitality. Robert Burns is known as Scotland's favourite son and his birthday was also this week (which is the traditional time to hold Burns Suppers) so it was topical as well. Add to that I've never seen it done before while Valentines Balls are numerous and you may begin to understand my choice.

Next chapter – second task and fireworks.

Chapter 14

Petunia looked at her bedside clock and couldn't believe the time displayed there, she never slept past first light but the way things had been going lately it was hardly surprising she didn't wake.

After the indignity of having a pest control van parked in their driveway for five consecutive days, clearing out an infestation that just kept returning time and time again. They then had to suffer the humiliating pictures in the local press, featuring the boy and his friends distributing toys at that orphanage. The story that the boy was of disreputable character just didn't hold water any longer.

Petunia was now afraid to show her face anywhere in the street, due to the number of nosey neighbours who wanted to ask her questions she couldn't really answer. She also had to suffer Vernon's constant bitching that they didn't know the boy had money for all those years he was in their care.

A few of the schemes he had thought up for getting his hands on all of the boy's wealth were beginning to scare her. That he could even consider some of those things left her wondering who Vernon Dursley really was.

Something was tugging at the edge of her consciousness and she realised what was bothering her, if that clock was correct there should be daylight inside the bedroom. Half in hope that this was something that could deflect attention away from the Dursleys, but more in terror that this was next on the list of catastrophes to befall her family Petunia opened the bedroom curtains.

What she saw was nothing, or should that be there was nothing to see, the entire window was black. With shaking hands she opened the window to find a few neighbours already outside staring at their house, she also noticed that their entire front garden was black. Driveway, path, even the grass and shrubs were all jet black.

Petunia walked down the stairs, hoping she was still dreaming rather than being awake and in this nightmare. Through the kitchen and out the black French doors to find a patio, furniture, fence and all

greenery had been changed to black. On turning around she could see that every inch of the house was the same, even the windows.

Her once lovely house now looked like a giant lump of coal, it was almost as dark inside as the cupboard under the stairs since all the glass was coloured black as well.

She was standing in her back garden, wearing only her nightgown, with her mouth hanging wide open in shock when a neighbour's voice came from the other side of the fence, "Interesting colour scheme you have there Petunia, though I hate to think what the residents association will make of it."

Petunia Dursley ran back into number four Privet Drive screaming.

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Gabrielle ran into Harry's dwelling like a mini-whirlwind, whizzing up to everyone for a quick two-kiss greeting, trying to catch up on events using no more than a sentence before whizzing on to the next person. She took longer with Colin though, "Oh I can't thank you enough for the beautiful photographs of our holiday you sent. Mama nearly had a fit at the one of me and Fleur underwater. She couldn't understand why we were smiling and is much happier now about tomorrow, for that alone I thank you."

Apolline was standing being greeted by her hosts while watching her youngest daughter almost glow with exuberance, "Thank you Harry for taking Gabrielle to Australia, she really hasn't stopped talking about it since she came back, except to continually remind us how long it would be until we came here. She's been counting down the days and has hardly slept from too much excitement. Your group has really made a big impression on both my daughters."

"Thank you Apolline but I must point out that Fleur is a big part of that group and Gabrielle was a delight to have, she's so full of energy it's possible to get tired just watching her."

Claude Delacour was much more observant and straight to the point, "Are you expecting trouble here?"

Hermione understood what he meant and answered honestly, "Tonight this place is going to be very busy, any of our friends who we consider may be taken as a hostage will be spending the night here. They think a detention is a small price to pay for not being at the bottom off the lake tomorrow. Knowing this Barchoke has increased the goblin guards outside from two to ten, Gabrielle will be perfectly safe here but we would advise not going near the castle until after the second task."

Claude raised his eyebrows, "You really think they'd go that far?"

Harry tried to explain their reasoning, "I don't think there is a 'they' anymore; it's almost exclusively Dumbledore. Madame Maxine seems to be distancing herself from the tournament after the Umbridge debacle of the first task, while Karkaroff can't enter the castle. Barchoke hasn't been consulted and the ministry are sending Arthur Weasley to be their representative and judge, Dumbledore's doing all the organising as far as we can make out. This whole tournament was apparently his baby from the start and, since the four of us are not dancing to his tune the great man is spitting his dummy out of his pram."

Victor entered with his parents and Fleur, this brought more screams of excitement from Gabrielle as she raced towards her sister, Victor handled the introductions between the Krum and Delacour parents.

The Grangers portkeyed in just as a worried Daphne and Tracy arrived earlier than expected. "Victor, Harry, when we finished potions today Dumbledore asked to speak to Millie for a moment. She told us to go on to lunch and she would catch up, she never did. When she didn't arrive for defence, we told Professor Black and he warned us to get our arses over here. He and Professor Lupin are spreading the word and our friends will all be bailing out the castle first chance they get."

Victor was raging mad, "The old man has gone too far!"

Harry was glad Kalina was here because she was the only one with any chance of calming Victor, he wasn't feeling too calm himself.

She currently had her hand on her son's arm, "Victor, you like this girl?"

It was a testament to how angry Victor was that he gave such an open answer to his mother, "She is a very nice girl who was my date for the dance, I got her flowers for Valentine's Day and now she will find herself at the bottom of the lake. Yes I like Millie and if one hair of her head is harmed..." Victor suddenly had an idea, "Harry, when Cedric gets here we can go and take her back. The castle will help you, please?"

Harry really wanted to help his friend, "Victor, the four of us with the castle helping could probably achieve anything we wanted, but the old man would just grab another student. While you and I might think this was ok, we both know Millie would wipe the floor with us for allowing someone else to be put down there in her place."

The slight trace of a smile from his friend showed Harry he was right. Millie didn't want to be at the bottom of the lake but her sense of fair play would mean she wouldn't accept anyone else now being put in danger instead of her.

"We will rescue her first, I don't think she'll be too upset at being publicly recognised as the person Victor Krum would miss the most, especially if she gets to awake in your arms tomorrow."

Victor wanted there to be no misunderstandings, "We rescue Millie first?"

Harry nodded, "Unless they somehow get in here to snatch Hermione, Emma or Luna, but that my friend would be a war! It will be Millie first tomorrow, I promise."

Hermione asked, "What are we going to do about Dumbledore Harry, he's getting more and more desperate? Desperate is dangerous."

“I think it’s time to take Dumbledore down, tomorrow might just be the day for it.”

Marko Krum couldn’t believe what he was hearing, “Surely the man is too powerful for you to defeat him?”

Harry chuckled, “Oh I think we can be sure he would kick my arse in a duel, what I had in mind was more in line with a public humiliation. Our country believes Dumbledore can do no wrong, destroy that myth and you destroy the man.”

The Gryffindor contingent arrived, all the people who were practicing for the Ceilidh were on the needing protection list, of the twenty eight only Justin, Ernie, Theodore and Blaise were not considered at risk. None of the champions could imagine a scenario where Justin Finch-Fletchley would ever be the thing they missed the most. Since their friend Hannah was dating him, not a word was said.

Hannah and Susan were actually last to arrive, Cedric had picked up on what was happening and escorted the girls to their last class of the day, sitting outside the door waiting on them, with his wand ready in his hand.

Remus and Sirius arrived to say that McGonagall was suspicious something was going on while Dumbledore appeared totally unconcerned. Moony informed the Gryffindors that they all had detention and would serve it tonight, here with him.

The resulting cheer had Sirius shaking his head, “These brash Gryffindors, when will they ever learn some subtlety. Miss Bulstrode has a detention for being out of her dorm after curfew, unless she has a very good reason for it. Miss Greengrass and Miss Davis will of course be tucked up in their beds.”

The laughter was interrupted by Dobby announcing that dinner was ready. It was quite a group and the table had been expanded to accommodate everyone but Dobby and Winky enjoyed working their socks off. Especially the ones Harry brought his little friend back from Australia.

Kalina watched as her son scowled every time he glanced at the empty seat next to him, she asked Emma to explain why no one sat beside her son despite the room being very busy.

Emma smiled and whispered in her ear, "That's Millie's seat, no one else would dare sit there. The first night we met them she sat across from Victor, but ever since she has sat there."

A small conspiratorial smile crossed Kalina's lips, "We must talk later."

"If it's anything like last time, I won't sleep much tonight anyway. At least it's not bloody dragons this time, though I would be worried sick if Hermione was at the bottom of that lake."

Apolline patted Emma's arm in understanding, "I know just how you feel, my insides turn to ice with the thought that both my daughters could have ended up at the bottom of the lake."

Her youngest daughter chipped in, "I wouldn't be worried, I've seen them underwater and know they would come for me. They'll have Millie free in no time."

This earned Gabrielle a smile from Victor, his only one since hearing Millie was taken to be his hostage.

The Delacour and Krum parents had their own rooms while the Delacour sisters shared, Cedric and Victor were also sharing but the rest of their friends were bunking in makeshift dorms. The guys were in the training room while the girls had the lounge. Remus, Sirius and Dan were keeping guard on the connecting corridor, nothing untoward was going to happen on their watch.

A cloak-wearing Harry was standing behind a seated Dan, who was reading a book to keep himself awake until Sirius took over.

The opportunity for some mischief was just too good to pass up, "You do know wizards can make themselves invisible?"

Dan was out his seat as if he'd received an electric shock, "What the bloody hell!"

Harry couldn't contain his laughter and let the hood fall back, Dan's expression at seeing his head apparently floating was even funnier.

Dan suddenly got serious, "It's a good job I trust you with my daughter Harry, I'd hate to think you were using that to sneak about."

Harry let the cloak fall open so it was slightly less disconcerting for Dan, "I'm using my cloak to 'sneak about' but not in the way you think. I'm heading over to the castle and would prefer not to be seen, I've a feeling the old man is going to pull something tomorrow and I want some insurance. The thought of Victor's fist rearranging his nose is a pleasant one but in reality, outside the castle Dumbledore could take the four of us easy."

Dan was actually embarrassed with his comment, "Sorry son, I know there's far more likelihood of my daughter sneaking into your room. It's just so bloody disheartening to know that, even sitting outside her room with a shotgun, you could waltz right past me and I wouldn't even know. I've had all these scenarios running through my head since she was four, about how I would chase off the boyfriends who weren't worthy of my little princess and you negated them all. I guess what I'm trying to say is that you are more than worthy of her Harry, and I trust you to take care of her."

It was Harry's turn to be embarrassed as his joke had backfired and turned into quite a tender moment. Dan's words meant the world to him, "I think you're wrong Dan, I'll never be worthy of Hermione but I aim to spend my life trying to be. Now I better get out of here before we both end up crying like a couple of girls."

Dan pulled what he could see of Harry into a hug, "That's some cloak son."

The look of pride on his face was unmistakable, "It was my father's, I'll lend it to you some time."

Harry portkeyed to the castle while Dan no longer needed his book to stay awake. His mind was racing with the possible fun he could have using an invisibility cloak, he felt like a kid again as he sat chuckling to himself.

-oOoOo-

Harry was well acquainted with the infirmary so had no trouble making a portkey to take him there, he headed straight for the screened-off area.

There, lying on different beds were four people he immediately recognised, it took him a few minutes to work out what the old man was up to but then it clicked, division.

Ron Weasley was obviously his choice, though anyone who could think he was the thing Harry would miss most would have to be really delusional. Dumbledore's plans for a reconciliation with the prat showed just how much he'd lost touch with reality, either that or being barred from their accommodation had left him blind to what was really happening.

Next to Ron was Cho Chang, again the chances of Cedric and her getting back together were non-existent. Dumbledore seemed determined to renew old alliances with the hope that it would wreck the champion's group. Introducing Ron and Cho with their glaring jealousy just might, but only in the old goat's mind was that ever going to happen.

Roger Davies was next and had originally confused Harry until he vaguely remembered Fleur having one dance with him at the Ceilidh, this told Harry two things. That Madame Maxine had refused any of her student's participation in this task and Dumbledore was indeed getting desperate.

He also wondered if this was the manipulator's attempts to end the rift between Ravenclaw and the other three houses, since the champions had no contact with them it was strange that two of that house found themselves as the things missed most. He doubted Fleur could even remember Roger's name.

The last bed was the reason Harry was here, Dumbledore had actually got something right. Millicent Bulstrode was like a flower, given the nourishment of friendship she had bloomed. She would never be a classic beauty but her wonderful personality could fill a room with warmth, laughter and love. Like his Hermione, she was a rare diamond that sparkled in the appropriate lighting.

By anyone's definition Fleur Delacour was a stunningly beautiful young woman, stand Hermione next to her and Harry's eyes wouldn't even see Fleur. Victor wasn't quite there yet but just by him showing an interest in her was enough to allow Millie to shine brightly. Her light attracting the Bulgarian like a moth to a flame.

Harry bent and kissed Millie's cheek before whispering in her ear, "I promise we will come for you Millie, you will awake in the arms of your prince."

He then did what he came for and cast monitor and tracking charms on Millie, Sal hissed that he was refusing an opportunity here and, after considering his words Harry agreed. Harry cast the same charms on the other three hostages before leaving to carry out the rest of his business.

-oOoOo-

They made their way down to the lake as a group, Cedric's parents were there to wish them all luck and be introduced to Fleur and Victor's parents. Amos was attending as a parent, being minister with a son as champion was why Arthur represented the ministry today.

There were hugs and kisses all around with the girls making sure Victor wasn't left out. They were aware the one he wanted to be doing that with was at the bottom of the lake but that didn't mean they couldn't show him their support.

Kalina couldn't help but smile, "Victor's main purpose in coming here was to make friends, it would seem that he has achieved that."

The three mothers had all had a good gossip last night and were quickly becoming friends. Apolline agreed, "Fleur wished for the same but didn't hold out much hope, watching my daughters in that company last night was a dream come true for me. It is very difficult for a Veela to be recognised for herself yet they all just see Fleur and Gabrielle."

Emma partially understood, "I think it all stems from Harry's desire to be treated as 'just Harry,' if they can do that for him then a famous Quidditch player or a Veela is not such a great stretch."

Hermione had both arms around Harry and didn't want to let go, "I have my basilisk suit on under this robe, are you sure I can't come with you?"

"Sorry love, you know that's not possible. We'll be taking no chances down there and be back shortly." A final kiss and she headed off to join her mum.

The four champions, accompanied by Luna and Colin, made their way to the floating dock where Dumbledore awaited them.

Albus raised his eyebrow in question at the two youngsters who flashed their press credentials at him, he nodded and continued. "There are four people at the bottom of the lake awaiting rescue by the champions, Ronald Weasley, Cho Chang, Roger Davies and Millicent Bulstrode to be precise. They are all placed at various locations throughout the merpeople's village and you will have one hour to rescue your hostage." Albus couldn't quite hide the little smirk, consigning the hostages to different locations would force the champions to split-up.

Cedric soon wiped the smile off his face, "Can I ask just who I'm supposed to save?"

Dumbledore had his 'talking to petulant child' voice cranked up to the maximum, "Why Mr Diggory, I thought that would be obvious, weren't you romantically involved with Miss Chang?"

“Just shows we can all make mistakes, I wouldn’t lift a finger to help that jealous, bullying little bitch!”

Fleur butted-in, “Excuse me, who is Roger Davies? Do you have a picture so I may recognise him?”

Harry had to say something as Victor appeared ready to attack Dumbledore, “But past an hour – the prospect’s black. Too late, it’s gone, it won’t come back. So this is my chance to finally see the back of that jealous git Ron or just more empty words spouted by a man who should have retired years ago?”

The smirk was long gone from Dumbledore’s face and replaced with a scowl that almost matched the one Victor was aiming in his direction. Harry had every intention of ruining the old git’s day, he cast a sonorus on himself, “Headmistress McGonagall, I need to speak with you right away.”

This silenced everyone in the stands, summoning McGonagall as if she was some errant first year was a sure fire way to unleash that famous Scottish temper.

She apparated directly on to the dock, “What can I do for you Mr Potter?” Minerva figured Harry was going for a big play here and had already cast sonorus on herself.

Harry’s voice could easily be heard by the entire crowd, who were now eagerly awaiting the unexpected pre-task entertainment, “Headmistress McGonagall, there are currently four Hogwarts students unconscious and held hostage at the bottom of the lake. Did you give permission for this use of students entrusted into your care?”

The sonorus was superfluous as mount Minerva’s eruptions would probably be heard without it. “No I bloody didn’t” she whirled on Dumbledore, “What the hell do you think you’re playing at, putting MY students at risk?”

“The students are in no danger...”

Harry's voice boomed out over the lake, "You say they are in no danger, forgive me if I don't believe the man who employed Voldemort to teach us. Did you enquire with the Weasleys, Changs, Davies's or Bulstrodes if it was ok for you to use their children in this manner? Unconscious and hidden at the bottom of the lake in the hope we'll risk our lives to rescue them."

Dumbledore looked shocked, "What do you mean? You have to rescue them. That's what all these people are here to watch!"

"Well then they are going to be disappointed. The rules say we must take part, we intend to do that. It's not like the spectators actually paid to get in here."

Harry turned to a still fuming McGonagall, "Headmistress all our friends slept in my accommodation last night, except one. We suspect that Dumbledore here abducted Millie after her potions lesson, she knew she was going to be a target and swore she wouldn't go voluntary. If that is the case, then I'm afraid Albus here has spent his last night in Hogwarts. He may not take these students's safety seriously but I do."

"Mr Potter, if I discover ANY of these students were abducted as you describe I shall be contacting the aurors. I'm afraid it would be pointless banning him from the castle as I intend to sack him here and now for endangering students."

Dumbledore tried to bluster, "I have the authority to take hostages under the rules of the tri-wizard tournament..."

Smack, for a small woman of ample build, Molly Weasley was deceptively quick. Years of keeping Fred and George under control must have sharpened her reflexes. She and Arthur had apparated onto the dock and her hand had connected with Dumbledore's cheek before he could do anything about it.

"How dare you use one of my children for this, Ron was nearly killed in first year, Ginny his second. Dementors nearly had Ron again in third and now you place him, unconscious and defenceless, at the

bottom of the lake. Just who the fuck do you think you are? What gives you the right to treat my children in this manner?"

Normally Arthur would be trying to calm Molly down but today he appeared ready to join her in beating-up Albus. Another three sets of parents were rushing to the scene with seemingly the same intent.

Molly spoke to Harry, "I know you haven't been friends since this arse started the tournament but I'm begging you Harry to save my boy."

"Mrs Weasley, Ginny and the twins stayed with me last night for protection from him, I never figured Ron was in any danger. He's scattered the hostages all over the village in the attempt to force the champions to split up, it's too dangerous so we won't do that and I have already promised to save our friend. I'm sorry but you are just going to have to hope his promises that they are in no danger hold true."

Victor approached Graham and Glenda Bulstrode and gave a short bow, "Mr and Mrs Bulstrode I apologise that your daughter's involvement with me has seen her in this predicament. I swear to you though that we will get her back and she had better be unharmed or there will be repercussions." His glance at Albus left no doubt who his anger was directed at.

Glenda was well aware of her daughter's infatuation with this young wizard, from his stance and body language it wasn't difficult to see he cared for Millie too. "Thank you for that, please don't blame yourself as we all know who is responsible. I feel much happier with my daughter in your safe hands than anywhere near this moron."

With another polite bow Victor made his way back to the other champions, pulling his robe off as he went.

McGonagall went spare as Luna and Colin revealed their basilisk suits, "Mr Potter I cannot allow these children to accompany you, they are also in my care and that would make me as bad as that old arse Dumbledore."

“Headmistress both Colin and Luna have press credentials that allow them to accompany us, more importantly for you, parental consent letters. We practiced relentlessly in the Pacific Ocean and both are more than qualified to do this, otherwise they would be sitting in the stands like the reporters from the Prophet.”

He handed over the letters and cancelled the sonorus charm, “Guys I have a few surprises for you.” Placing two fingers in his mouth he blasted out an ear piercing whistle.

Three Hogwarts boats came zooming out the cave they were usually stored in and stopped at the dock in front of the astonished group, “Victor and me in the first one, Fleur and Colin next with Cedric and Luna in number three.”

They climbed into the boats and used banishing charms to get under way, they heard Luna ask, “Eh Harry, what is all this?”

The rest then noticed the items in the boats, “Blankets and flasks of hot cocoa, a little more to the left guys.”

It was Victor’s turn to ask, “How do you know to go to the left?”

“Because I have a tracking charm on Millie, the monitoring charm indicates she’s in some kind of enchanted sleep that will be broken when she reaches the surface.” The others were looking at Harry with expressions of awe on their faces, “What? I promised Victor we would get her and I had a sneaky suspicion the old man was up to something. I also promised Millie she would wake up in the arms of her prince so you better not let me down Mr Krum.”

Victor had his hand on Harry’s shoulder as he struggled for the words, “Cedric said after seeing the basilisk you should just be handed the cup, I agree but for a different reason. Thank you for this Harry.”

When Harry called stop, they circled the boats and tied them together before diving into the freezing water. Their suits and gillyweed spared them the worst of it as they headed straight down, Harry in front as

his tracking charm led them right to Millie.

The three mermen on guard were expecting one wizard, not a group of six to descend directly on top of them. They were waving their tridents threateningly until Colin started taking pictures, the light startled them and they attacked straight into a barrage of spells. The three mermen were soon laying there unconscious as Victor drew his knife, making short work of Millie's bindings.

The commotion was attracting lots of attention and they had to get out of there fast, Victor had Millie in his arms and heading for the surface as the rest of them provided cover.

Harry had to grab Colin by the neck of the suit and drag him upward, the boy was so busy taking photos he forgot the people swimming towards him with the tridents weren't exactly being friendly towards wizards.

The flashes from Colin's camera combined with the spells raining down on them soon discouraged even the most ferocious mermen. Harry thought that Fleur and Cedric nailing the two who were in the lead might also had something to do with them giving up the chase, the group could now see the outlines of the boats above them.

When Millie's head broke the surface she was instantly awake but completely disorientated, looking back down into the water she could see whose arms were around her. Millie didn't hesitate but plunged her head back under to kiss Victor.

Harry watched, unsure whether to give Victor the antidote or offer Millie gillyweed so they could continue without the need to breathe, common sense won over as they needed to get into the boats.

Millie had been hit with several drying charms, had a blanket wrapped around her and a cup of hot cocoa in hand, but it was Victor's arm around her waist that provided the most comfort.

"I'm sorry guys, I figured why he wanted me to stay and was all set to say no but never got the chance. The next think I remember was

waking up in Victor's arms." She couldn't help but smile at that memory.

Colin meanwhile was being berated by Luna, "What the hell were you playing at down there?"

"I got some fantastic shots, just wait till you see them..."

"Never mind the shots, you almost got yourself skewered! Those mermen weren't playing around, no picture is worth a trident in the gut."

A sheepish Colin was forced to agree but knew he was forgiven when Luna handed him a mug of cocoa. Harry, Cedric and Fleur had them heading back towards the dock.

Harry had just stepped out the boat when he had his arms full of Hermione, Cedric was left to offer an explanation to the worried parents. "I'm sorry but the merpeople attacked us as soon as we rescued Millie, if we didn't have the boats we would need to have fought them all the way to the shore."

All eyes switched to Dumbledore, "The merpeople were instructed only to intervene if you were assisting each other with your task."

Victor's angry eyes bored right through Dumbledore, "And who gave them that instruction?"

"I did! If you would only do what you were supposed to do then we wouldn't be having these problems..."

Harry interrupted, "Blaming everyone else for your mistakes again, not going to work this time old man. You will never set foot in Hogwarts again, Headmistress contact the aurors, Millie wasn't even asked to participate."

They left the dock, being joined by friends and family as they made their way back to the cube.

Igor saw his master's plan go up in smoke and decided to make a run for it, his life was now forfeit with the dark lord. The dark lord accepted no excuses, even though he'd done exactly as asked and performed his task perfectly, Igor was under no illusion that anything other than death awaited him there.

When the plan was discovered the ministry would also be hunting him within the hour, it was time to go.

He had his stuff already packed so his goals were to get on board his ship, then apparate the hell away from here. That was as far as his planning went for now.

It was a dejected Dumbledore who waited at the docks for the merpeople to return the abandoned hostages when the time limit expired. Molly Weasley appeared on the verge of smacking him again as the clock counted down, Albus couldn't understand where it all went wrong.

How could they put their own group's safety over that of the hostages he'd chosen for them? He couldn't help but think if he'd been allowed to put Miss Granger down there, Harry would have battled the entire village. Albus didn't know his day was about to get a whole lot worse.

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Graham and Glenda Bulstrode now understood some of the changes in their daughter, it was impossible to be in this company and not change. From the minister of magic to the muggle parents of Harry's betrothed, international Quidditch star to goblin banker, all life was here and mixing as if it was a normal, everyday occurrence. Glenda was looking on as her daughter was surrounded by friends, all asking how she was and congratulating her for getting out of there. Not once did she let go of Victor's arm and the young man didn't appear to mind in the slightest.

She felt a woman appear at her side, "My son usually has better manners than this regarding introductions but I think his mind is on other things at the moment. Hi I'm Kalina Krum and our children appear to be getting on well together, don't you think?"

Harry and Hermione were arm in arm and heading towards their bedrooms with the intention to change out of their basilisk suits when he seemed to stumble, the hissing of his ring was accompanied by some unaccustomed language. "That stupid old whiskered wanker couldn't even do that right, Molly will tear his arms and legs off for this."

All eyes were now on Harry but it was to the three redheads he directed his attention, "Ron's just been taken away from Hogwarts by portkey, he's currently scared shitless and in a lot of pain. I think Voldemort sprung his trap and missed!"

A/N Thanks for reading.

Just a reminder of my original premise for this story:

Harry gets some much needed help and advice before having some fun by allowing his marauder heritage out to play. My attempt at a horcrux free fourth year fic.

Chapter 15

Peter was getting more and more nervous, the Potter brat should have been here by now. All Igor had to do was plant the portkey in the correct hostage's bindings, it was timed to activate when the task began and would bring the next person to touch the hostage directly here. It would also bring the hostage but his orders were very simple, kill any spares.

His master was not noted for his patience, five minutes after the deadline was enough, "Potter is not here therefore Karkaroff's incompetence will cost the fool his life."

They had just began to walk away when the portkey delivered a bound Ronald Weasley with two floundering mermen into the graveyard. Peter followed his instructions and quickly dispatched the creatures while the dark lord had his wand trained on the terrified Ron.

"You are not Potter, Crucio!"

Peter watched the boy writhing in agony and was aware it would soon be too late to act, "Master, Potter must not have been able to save the boy in time. Perhaps he's not as powerful as we thought?"

This stayed Voldemort's hand, "You could be right, his heir status would only help him inside the castle walls."

"This boy is most definitely your enemy my lord. Can you imagine Potter's pain when he couldn't save what he'd miss most, only for you to take it from under his nose? It will destroy the boy."

Peter could see his master liked the idea, and it would save him having to go chasing after Potter to somehow bring him back here. "We could use this boy for the ceremony, then send his blood traitor friend to Potter, a piece at a time of course my lord."

The temptation of returning to a real body with the added bonus of causing Potter so much pain was just too great to resist, especially

since he didn't actually have to touch the brat to kill him. "Very well Wormtail, we'll use the boy. Just remember how I reward failure so make no mistakes!"

Ron was barely conscious as Peter tied him to a headstone before triple checking his preparations. He'd seen it happen enough times to know exactly how his master rewarded failure, it was not an easy way to die.

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All eyes were on Harry but it was Hermione who reacted first, "Harry you can't, not now."

"Hermione, you of all people know I must. I was the one that left him down there, I even made a flippant comment to Dumbledore about finally getting rid of the prat. If it were you Voldemort had captured I would already have left!"

"Then I'm coming with you!"

Harry held her face gently in his hands and brushed her lips with his, "Not this time love, it's too dangerous for you to be there. I can't and won't allow anything to happen to you."

Hermione looked into his green eyes and saw the determination set within them. All she could think of was that Harry didn't want or need her and Hermione's world crashed. She pulled away and ran out the room in tears.

Harry was gutted but not entirely surprised by her reaction though he couldn't change his mind, he didn't want Hermione anywhere near Voldemort. Harry attempted to focus on what needed to be done. "I placed a tracking charm on Ron so I can make a portkey that will lead me directly to him."

"Lead us directly to him you meant to say," Victor quipped.

"Yes he's getting forgetful in his old age," answered Fleur

Cedric always thought actions spoke louder than words so just drew his wand and stood by Harry's side.

"Shit, you know we're coming!" Sirius may have just volunteered Remus as well but Moony didn't seem to mind.

Amos just had to say something, "Harry, I can have the aurors handle this, that's what they're trained for."

"I would love to let them deal with it sir but Ron doesn't have that luxury. Voldemort will spend some time spouting rubbish about how he's the greatest, baddest, coolest, cleverest dude on the planet before he tries to kill you. Ron's probably got less than ten minutes left."

Amos tried again, "What about Dumbledore? He's the only wizard you-know-who has ever been afraid of."

"Sir, I've fought Voldemort twice. Both times inside Hogwarts and he didn't seem too scared of Dumbledore. I suspect that's a rumour started by the old coot to enhance his dwindling reputation, he wasn't fairing too well until Voldemort cursed me as a baby. We're wasting time here Ron doesn't have."

Fred and George stepped forward only for Harry to shake his head, "Sorry guys, not this time."

Barchoke was a different proposition though, "Harry, I have ten goblin guards outside. All would be willing to accompany us."

Harry smiled at the 'us' part and the room heard the ring hiss as he considered the offer, "Thank you Barchoke but I would feel better knowing your guards are here to protect those we leave behind. I don't believe this is a feint but we can't take that chance."

Claude Delacour, Marko Krum, Graham Bulstrode and Amos all kissed their wives before stepping forward, Harry didn't get to say any more as he was attacked.

Emma had raced after her daughter and found her laying face-down on her bed, sobbing her heart out. She none-to-gently grabbed her daughter by the shoulder and turned her around so she could see her face. "Hermione Jane Granger, I've never been ashamed of you before but I am now. That young man you profess to love is leaving here to try and perform a dangerous rescue, and you're in here, crying like a baby!"

"Harry doesn't want me mum," she sobbed.

"Hermione, do you honestly think your father or I would have let you go? Harry was just being very sensible, unlike you."

She could see that penetrated her daughter's brain, "You should be down there reminding Harry what he has to come home to, not letting him leave here worried if you're going to speak to him when he returns. It's time to grow up Hermione, you yourself told me this is who Harry is, of course he's going to try to rescue this boy. If you can't accept that then..."

Emma never got to finish her sentence as Hermione leapt from the bed and shot off down the corridor as fast as she could run, praying she wasn't too late and he'd already gone.

Spying her love, she screamed "Harry!" before pouncing on him. Her kiss pushed away any thoughts of hurt out of both their minds. When it ended she whispered in his ear, "Tonight I'll be in your room, you'd better be there Potter. This you can and will allow."

Harry gave her a quick kiss, "That's a date love, sorry but we've got to rush." When he saw Barchoke with the blade in his hand, Harry called for the Sword of Gryffindor and placed it in his shoulder holster before turning a piece of rope into a portkey.

Harry looked at all the faces watching them, "I promise we'll take care and be back as soon as we're able. Dan please look after everyone." He activated the portkey and the eleven of them disappeared.

Hermione felt slightly better when she saw the number of people accompanying Harry but still dropped to her knees crying the moment they had left.

The room was descending into tears as Gabrielle hugged her mum and cried, Ginny cried in Neville's arms, Millie had to be comforted by her mum and Hermione was a basket case.

It was Luna who took command, "We are so not doing this, Harry promised they'd be back and he never breaks his promises." The little blond was just getting into her stride, "George, go and fetch Madam Pomfrey, we may have injured returning. Fred, inform your parents exactly what's happening, if they're beating up Dumbledore don't interrupt until they're finished."

It was the Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Slytherin girls turn to be given orders from Lieutenant Luna, "Girls, can you turn the training room into a makeshift infirmary? We hopefully won't need it but better get it ready just in case. Can you need to let the guards know that there will be people coming and tell them who's allowed entry." She then turned to Colin and the vulnerability wasn't as easily hidden, "Colin, could you get my dad?" he gave her a quick hug before running out the door.

Luna felt a hand on her shoulder and turned to find Tabitha Diggory there, "You know there's a perfectly good infirmary at the castle and St Mungo's as well."

Luna couldn't manage a smile for the kind woman who was the minister's wife and Cedric's mum, "I know ma'am, it's more to give people something to do rather than sitting worrying about what could be happening."

"You're a very bright girl Luna, I just wish you had something for me to do."

"I know exactly what you mean," Luna then knelt beside Emma who was trying in vain to comfort a distraught Hermione.

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Down at the temporary dock, the leader of the merpeople was conversing with Dumbledore while Cho and Roger were being handed over to the waiting arms of their relieved families.

Arthur didn't need to speak mermish to understand that something was seriously wrong. If the body language indicated by their leader was anything to judge, he was currently tearing strips off Dumbledore.

When he saw Fred come racing round the corner, Arthur was sure that Ron's hand on the family clock was now pointing at mortal peril. He'd never seen either of the twins appear so serious, therefore it must be bad news.

"Mum, Dad, Ron's been taken by you-know-who, portkeyed right out of the lake."

Dumbledore attempted to get a grip on the situation before it got out of hand, "We don't know exactly what's happen yet..."

Fred was furious, "Yes we do! Harry had tracking and monitoring charms on all the hostages."

This stunned Albus and Fred couldn't believe what he was seeing, "The great Albus Dumbledore hadn't even considered doing that! You claimed they were all safe while Harry was the only one keeping watch on them."

This was too much for Arthur, his fist connected with Dumbledore's jaw and the old fool ended up in the lake. The merpeople rather pointedly left him splashing about before Amelia Bones levitated him out.

Fred could see his mother was in a state so got to the good news, "Harry's leading a rescue party to go and get him back, you're to come up to his accommodation and wait on them returning."

Dumbledore got shakily to his feet, "A rescue party, I'd better get up there right away, they're sure to need me." The old man, standing

there dripping wet with a bloody lip and offering to rescue someone suddenly appeared ludicrous. Albus looked as if he'd have trouble getting a goldfish out a bath with a net.

Fred drowned the last of his illusions, "They've already left and besides Harry, there's French, Bulgarians, a goblin, a couple of Hogwarts professors and even the minister of magic. All left to save my brother, my brother that you kidnapped and put down there. Your name was mentioned but nobody trusted you enough to stand with them."

Amelia Bones had been called when the champions left, she was intending to charge Dumbledore with endangering these children. Now that the Weasley boy was missing, the charges just got a lot more serious. "Dumbledore, you have an appointment at the ministry, the length of stay will depend on the outcome of Mr Potter's rescue mission. Your future's tied to that boy's welfare because I'm quite prepared to charge you with anything that happens to him."

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The rescue party found themselves appearing in a graveyard with wands and weapons ready, there were obviously wards up since the portkey hadn't led them directly to Ron. There was no trouble locating him though as his cries for help could clearly be heard. They spread out and cautiously made their way forward, Ron was at least still alive so this was not the time to go charging into an unknown situation.

They found Ron tied to a gravestone and Peter standing over him with a wand in his hand, "Bone of the father, unknowingly given. You will renew your son."

His wand transported something from the ground to the biggest bloody cauldron Harry had ever seen, the fire underneath it had the contents bubbling away like mad.

"There's no escape this time Peter," Sirius growled.

Peter's response was to instantly fire of a brace of killing curses aimed in their general direction. Amos just managed to pull Cedric to

the ground as the green beam flew through the space his son had been occupying a split second earlier. Their good fortune was short lived however as they found themselves at eye level with Nagini. The giant snake was in mid-strike when the razor-sharp blade wielded by Barchoke halted its forward process. The severed head landed beside the minister of magic and his son, both of whom looked towards the goblin with gratitude.

Peter had transformed into his rat form and scurried away, dodging curses as he went, only to transform back behind a large headstone and fire another couple of killing curses.

They were all forced to take cover as Peter continued this deadly game of hide and seek which saw pieces of marble flying through the air as both sides blasted headstones apart, attempting to connect with the person hiding behind it.

Peter's ability, and the fact that he was throwing killing curses was keeping their superior numbers pinned down, you had no idea where he would pop-up next and those green beams had to be avoided at all cost.

It all ended with a high pitched squeal as Peter tried his trick just once too often and a big black dog emerged, violently shaking the squealing rat in his jaws. Padfoot tossed the rat onto a clear patch of grass and multiple stunners hit Wormtail. Sirius transformed with a huge grin on his face, only to be punched on the shoulder by a raging godson.

“Sirius, next time forget the grandstanding, we don't need to announce our presence, just stun the bastard where he stands!” Harry ended his words by pulling the shocked marauder into a hug before checking that everyone was ok. Remus and Graham were cutting an unconscious Ron free, the killing curses flying all around him had caused the terrified Ron to faint. The worst damage they had taken was cuts and bruises from all the marble shrapnel, they had been very lucky.

When Sal started hissing the entire group quietened down, Harry as usual was left to translate. “Sal says they were attempting an

extremely dark ritual here, not used since the time of the Pharaohs. Voldemort's spirit is in that cauldron, which will explode in a matter of minutes and return him to that wraith form again. Sal reckons we might be able to adapt the ritual to bind him for good, but we only have seconds here to make up our minds."

All eyes turned to Amos, so glad that it wasn't Fudge where they would have to wait until he'd run a poll to see how it would affect his public standing. "Does it involve anyone getting hurt?"

Harry glanced down at the unconscious Wormtail, "Well not anyone who matters."

This seemed to be the clincher for Amos, "That bastard nearly killed my son, do it!"

Harry was spurred into action, "Marauders, I need that rat in human form, we also need to find a headstone that says 'Tom Riddle' on it."

"Here Harry!" Graham shouted, "it's the one Ron was tied to."

He turned to his fellow champions, "I want a couple of large chunks of that placed in the cauldron."

They didn't hesitate, Victor hit the headstone with a reducto curse, then Fleur and Cedric levitated the two largest pieces over the bubbling cauldron.

"Stone of the father, unknowingly given. You will confine your son." After Harry's words, Fleur and Cedric dropped the large lumps of stone into the now hissing liquid as Harry marched over to Peter.

"Revive him!"

Peter awoke and could be forgiven for thinking he was back in the shrieking shack, leaning over him were Sirius, Remus and Harry Potter. This was a different Harry Potter though, a Harry Potter who had determination in his eyes and just pulled the deadliest looking knife Peter had ever seen from behind his back.

“You picked the wrong side Peter and now it’s time to pay!” the knife flashed and Peter screamed.

Harry dug the point of his knife into the piece of flesh now lying on the grass, Peter looked on in horror as the Potter brat walked away with his ear on the point of his knife, skewered there like some bizarre shish kebab.

Harry approached the cauldron, “Flesh of the servant, forcibly taken. You will restrict your master.” He knocked the ear off the end of his knife and the cauldron emitted a great belch of steam.

Harry drew the sword of Gryffindor from his shoulder holster before verbally exploding, “What the fuck do you mean, ‘get everyone clear of the blast zone’, you never mentioned anything about a frigging blast zone?”

Every one waited with bated breath as Sal conversed with Harry, he didn’t appear too happy with what he was hearing. “Ok, there’s a good chance this whole cauldron could blow, you need to take cover now.”

Sirius was at his side, casting a shield charm at the cauldron. “You think I’m going back to tell the Granger girls I hid behind a headstone while you got injured, then you my boy are nuttier than squirrel shit. I would end up needing my own headstone by the time they were finished with me.”

Remus and the other three champions joined him as well, Victor gave the champions point of view. “We’ve stuck together so far and it’s worked for us, this is not the time to change things.”

Harry called a halt before things got totally out of hand, “We need some people to transport us home if we get injured, just make sure the bloody rat doesn’t get away again.”

Barchoke took a disk out his pocket, he twisted the centre and it transformed into a large metallic shield, a shield that accidentally and solidly whacked Peter on the head as the goblin joined Harry.

“He’s not going anywhere now and neither am I.” Barchoke placed himself, and his shield in front of Harry. Everyone else cast shield charms at the cauldron as Harry prepared himself.

Harry ran the edge of the sword along his palm, drawing blood which he then used to coat the blade, “Here goes nothing!” taking a deep breath he completed the ritual, “Blood of the enemy, willingly given. The sword and stone will seal your foe’s soul forever.”

Harry plunged the sword into the cauldron; a blood curling scream was the last thing he heard as it exploded with a force that made a mockery of the shield charms. Darkness overtook him.

The magical backlash released blew them away like leaves in an autumn wind, their bodies lay scattered and still. There aren’t words to describe Amos Diggory’s feelings when he reached his son and found him still breathing. The minister glanced over to where the cauldron had stood, the sight that greeted his eyes was way easier to describe. A roundish black boulder, at least a meter in diameter with veins of red and green running through it, had the Sword of Gryffindor embedded almost to its hilt into the rock.

“We need to get some people here to help, that blast took down all the wards.”

It was Claude Delacour who sounded the voice of reason, “Wait Amos, we can’t let what happened here become public knowledge. We need help but we also must get that thing somewhere that nobody can ever get their hands on it.”

A groaning and bleeding Barchoke just about managed to sit upright, “I agree with our French friend here, this has to be kept a secret. The blood that Harry placed on that blade means only he, or a direct descendant of his could ever remove the sword from the stone. That young man deserves some peace in his life for once. Let it be known that we prevented Voldemort returning to a body and banished him again, that is all that need be said.”

Marko and Graham had been checking the extent of the injured, "Harry and Sirius are the worst, the kids armour saved their lives and Remus being a werewolf is helping him for once."

Barchoke expected this news from Graham, "The magical backlash was focused on Harry because he was the one doing the binding. I suggest getting the sword and stone to Gringotts and locking it in our deepest, most secure vault."

Amos didn't have to think for too long, "Can we do that for now and make a final decision when the entire company can give their opinion. These young people have every right to have their say as well."

Barchoke had made it shakily to his feet before clutching the medallion around his neck, a minute later four heavily armed goblins arrived, ready for a fight.

Barchoke spoke to them in their native language and the four goblins hit their blades off their shields before surrounding the item and portkeying it and them away.

A groan from Victor signalled he was coming around, Fleur wasn't far behind him. "Graham, Barchoke and Marco, could you take Harry and Sirius back, we'll follow as soon as we can." Amos could see Cedric also beginning to stir and reckoned that shortly Remus would be the only one needing levitated.

Ron Weasley awoke and looked round at the total devastation in the graveyard. Headstones were smashed to smithereens and there were bodies everywhere, he recognised Harry lying unconscious with blood coming out his nose and ears.

He also recognised that bastard Peter and hoped he was dead, hard to tell with all the blood covering his balding head. Then Ron remembered who else had been here, "You-know-who's here, we have to get out of this place."

Amos approached the terrified boy, "It's ok son, he's been dealt with. You can leave with the first batch, I'm sure Molly will be past distraught by now."

Ron's gaze fixed on his former friend, without being told he knew it was Harry's idea to save him, just as he knew it was Harry who'd 'dealt' with the problem. Ron Weasley reckoned he could live to be a hundred and still never figure out Harry Potter.

He found himself helping a goblin to walk, though hobble would be a better description. Apparently, without Harry making the portkey they had to appear outside the Hogwarts wards, as the cube came into view the goblin guards raced to help them.

Harry and Sirius now had a goblin at each corner of the conjured stretchers their unconscious forms lay on while the injured goblin was also receiving help. Ron was finally going to see inside the cube he'd heard so much about, it only took being kidnapped, then rescued from you-know-who to make it happen.

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A clearly agitated Dobby popped into the lounge, "Mister Granger you are needed to be giving your permission, some of them have returned."

Hermione went from being barely able to function to beating her father out the door as she sped out the cube, the sight of the two stretchers just focused her determination to reach the group.

Hermione didn't ever notice Ron as she rushed right past him, he approached the door but was engulfed by his sobbing mother before he could step inside. Once she and his siblings had verified he was alright, Ginny and the twins headed back inside with the rest of the returning group while Ron was marched by his parents down to where Madam Bones and Headmistress McGonagall were finishing interviewing the other two un-rescued hostages.

There was relief he was alive and everyone wanted to know what happened, this was Ron's moment in the sun. He noticed Cho Chang eyeing him speculatively and Ron thought that this was more like it, all the girls loved a hero. He had no idea Cho was thinking that if Harry would risk his life to rescue this prat, then perhaps there was

still a chance for her with Cedric. Turns out both of them were delusional.

“Last thing I remember in school was Professor Dumbledore approaching me, when I woke up it was in a graveyard that had Pettigrew and you-know-who there. Pettigrew killed the two mermen while you-know-who put me under the Cruciatus, after that they tied me to a gravestone. I was in and out of consciousness but I remember the rescuers having a big fight, when I was finally cut down there were bodies lying everywhere.”

Amelia needed more information, “Mr Weasley, could you be a bit more specific about these bodies? Who was down and what condition were they in? Was the minister ok?”

Ron tried to remember as best he could, “The minister was ok, all the champions and professors Black and Lupin were on the ground. Harry’s goblin friend was also hurt, I think Harry and Professor Black are the worst though, that’s why they brought them back first.”

“What of you-know-who and Pettigrew?”

“Oh Pettigrew was definitely on the ground while the minister said you-know-who had been dealt with. From the state Harry was in, I would say it was him that did the dealing with.”

Amelia had learned all she could here, she needed to get to that graveyard. “Do you have any idea where this graveyard is?”

Ron shook his head, “Sorry Madam Bones, between the torture and spells flying everywhere I just wanted to get out of there. It never crossed my mind to ask just where there was.”

Arthur had also heard enough, “Minerva, it would appear Poppy is going to have her hands full very shortly. We’ll take Ron to St Mungo’s to get him checked over, then he’s coming home with us until this can be investigated. Amelia could you please keep me informed with what’s happening, my son has just been kidnapped and tortured by an unforgivable curse, someone’s going to pay.”

Ron was struggling to hide his disappointment, not only did he not get into Harry's home but there was nobody at the Burrow to play hero to. Even his twin brothers and sister appeared more concerned with how Harry was than him.

Hermione was at Harry's side and nothing or no one was going to remove her, the stretchers were heading for the make-shift infirmary. Poppy wanted to move them to the castle but all her potions and lotions then appeared, well ordered and aligned on shelves just waiting to be used.

Poppy didn't want Hermione there but was beaten into submission before she could even start to complain, Harry's armour was impervious to spells or any blade she had at her disposal. The suits were charmed-sealed and Poppy had no idea how to take it off the young wizard.

Hermione ran her finger down the centre of his chest to reveal a zipper, the same at the top of his hips and they were able to remove both articles from his heavily bruised body. With Hermione present, Poppy was pleased to see he was at least wearing underwear though she had no idea who this Calvin Klein was.

There were no tears now, her Harry had come back to her, battered, bruised and unconscious but he had come back. Hermione had been here before, ever since first year she'd visited Harry in the infirmary so this was at least familiar territory.

Poppy had completed her scan, "There doesn't seem to be any serious internal injuries, he has a concussion and two broken arms. It would appear both he and Sirius were directly in line with a blast of some sort, Harry got the brunt of it but his basilisk armour saved him from serious injury. Sirius is pretty much the same except broken ribs instead of arms."

Back in the lounge Graham was telling a captivated audience what happened, "So we had just got Pettigrew then Harry stabbed you-know-who with his sword. The magical backlash sent everyone flying but the other three champions were coming around as we left.

Barchoke was in front of Harry with a metal shield of some sort, it was lying on the grass all buckled and dented when we left. I reckon it probably saved both their lives”

Emma and Dan had waited to hear what had happened before going in to see Harry, they also wanted to give Hermione a few minutes with him. They and Luna entered the modified training room to find her sitting beside Harry while running her fingers through his hair. Poppy had her lift his head as she manipulated his throat to get some potion into Harry, Dan helped her do the same for Sirius.

Hermione never took her eyes off Harry as she spoke, “He’s going to be ok, I know he looks bad mum but this is where magic comes into its own. Harry will be back with us shortly.”

“Graham Bulstrode said Harry defeated Voldemort, it would appear the whole thing was a plan so he could capture Harry.”

Her daughter just nodded, “We both knew that the second Ron was taken, why else would Voldemort want the prat? How is everyone else?”

“From what we can gather your friends all stood with Harry and got hit with some magical blast when he finished Voldemort.”

Hermione was still slowly running her fingers through his untameable hair, almost as if to reassure herself that Harry was really here. “I should have been with him mum.”

It was Lieutenant Luna who answered her, “That’s rubbish Hermione and you know it, Harry wouldn’t have been able to concentrate with you there. He places a higher value on your life than anyone else’s, including his own! Harry would have been so concerned about you getting hurt that he could have ended up worse than he is. This is when he needs you Hermione, to be there for him when he wakes up. Don’t you dare give him a hard time for the decision he made today, the Harry Potter we both know and love couldn’t have done it any other way. How would Harry feel if he came round and the first thing he saw was you lying injured in the bed next to him?”

Their discussion was saved from going any further by the remainder of the rescue party arriving, Cedric, Fleur and Victor were effectively walking wounded while Remus was being assisted by Claude and Amos. Their families were all delighted to see them as Amelia hovered in the background, desperate for news but could understand Amos being more concerned about his son at the moment. Once Amos had assured Tabitha he was fine and they both could see Cedric was going to be ok, he headed straight for Amelia.

“Pettigrew is at the front door, under the watchful eyes of the goblin guards. No chances are to be taken with him, a trial and then the verdict carried out. You-know-who has also been dealt with by Harry.”

“I need more information than just ‘dealt with’, what the hell happened in that graveyard?”

Amos shook his head, “What happened there is known to very few and that’s the way it’s going to stay, let’s just say Harry Potter shoved the Sword of Gryffindor so far into you....Voldemort we’re not going to be seeing him again. There was no body but the magical backlash caused what you see here, a lot of people in this room deserve awards for their bravery but we don’t want this being looked at too closely. The last thing we need is some maniacal follower trying to bring him back!”

Amelia had been an auror long enough to know that sometimes it was the information you weren’t being given that told the story. If there was the slightest chance he could be returned, then she agreed that information should not be shared.

Amos was in full minister of magic mode now, “I’ll make you a portkey to take you there, we need to collect the bodies of two mermen and repair a lot of damage. Anything beyond repair will just have to be credited to muggle vandals. I want someone, not Dumbledore, to be able to translate to the merpeople how sorry we are at their loss and have the bodies returned to them. Where is Dumbledore anyway? I expected him to be here.”

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Albus looked around his cell, it didn't take long in this eight by six box. Revealing that Igor Karkaroff had assisted him with placing the hostages in the lake had proved a revelation too far for Amelia.

What he couldn't believe was that Harry had gone off to face Voldemort and deliberately left him behind, he understood their relationship was strained but that had really hit home to him just how badly it had deteriorated. Since Halloween everything that Albus touched appeared to turn to shit, he wondered if there was a polar opposite of the Midas touch and imagined it being christened the Dumbledore grope.

Harry's name coming out of that goblet had left him groping in the dark, trying to get some control over a situation that kept spiralling more and more out of his grasp. Now he found himself jobless, booted out of the castle and the review of his position as Supreme Mugwump could no longer be in any doubt.

Amelia had also informed him that she was including the charge of casting spells on a muggle, and the far more serious one of trying to break the betrothal of Harry and Hermione.

If Harry was successful in his rescue attempt, the public would adore him and Albus was screwed for trying to break his betrothal. If Harry failed then Amelia had already promised to implicate him in the boy's murder and Albus was screwed again. He'd been sitting trying to think of a third option but so far had come up with nothing, basically Albus Dumbledore was screwed!

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Harry emerged from his darkness to the soothing sensation of someone running their fingers slowly through his hair, he carefully opened his eyes and couldn't mistake the shape beside him, even in the dark and without his glasses. As his brain gradually came online, the results his senses were transmitting to aforementioned brain were both terrifying and exhilarating at the same time. He was in a bed with Hermione Granger.

A gentle kiss on his lips was way more than he expected, getting his head chewed off was more in line with what he was prepared for. "I thought you would be angry with me?"

Hermione could hear the rasp in his voice so produced a tumbler of ice cold water for him before answering, "I wasn't angry Harry, I was bloody furious. You've been unconscious for two days though which has given my rational side time to take control, that and Luna threatened me with terrible retribution if I gave you a hard time over this."

"Two days?"

"Yes Harry but let me finish before we move on to that. My rational side understands why you did it and both my parents swore they wouldn't let me go anyway but I was still hurt. If we're together then that means we're together, facing the good and bad, as long as we're together I don't mind."

"I have no problem with the good and the bad love, it's just facing Voldemort when you're fifteen I have a big problem with."

"Well since you've 'dealt' with him, can you promise me I'll never be left behind again? I've discovered I'm really bad at sitting waiting to find out if my betrothed is alive or dead."

Hermione's tears hurt Harry far more than his various injuries did, he held her tight and spoke softly to her. "I couldn't finish him for good love but I've done the next best thing." He could feel her entire body stiffen with fear so continued his tale, "His soul is trapped in rock, held there by the Sword of Gryffindor. Only someone of my bloodline can remove the sword from the stone."

Hermione understood immediately, "Like Merlin did with Excalibur, only Arthur could remove it."

"Yes, and I'm hoping that story doesn't get out as it paint's a large target over me and my descendants. The death eaters will want us to

revive their master while someone like Dumbledore would think it acceptable to wipe out the Potters for the greater good. No more Potters and Voldemort has no way back. Did everyone make it back all right? The rumours must have been flying about like confetti for the last two days.”

“The only thing reported is that you stabbed Voldemort and the magical backlash knocked you out. No lies but apparently not the whole story. Sirius woke this afternoon and everyone else was ok after a good night’s sleep.”

Harry had only a few worries, “I think Ron was out of it and Barchoke whacked Peter with his shield, the only thing he would be seeing was stars.”

Hermione snuggled in, “He’s not seeing them anymore, they kept him in a cage overnight while organising his trial. The result was never in doubt and he received the Dementor’s kiss. Dumbledore is also in jail while Amelia builds the case against him, as well as endangering the hostages he’s also being charged with cursing Dad and trying to break our betrothal. It looks as if he’s headed for Azkaban.”

Harry was suddenly very worried, “Did you sneak into my bed? What if your parents come in?”

Hermione just got comfortable so had no intention of moving, “Madam Pomfrey said it was ok to move you and Sirius back to your rooms yesterday, we set an emergency infirmary up in the training room and I have been by your side since. Mum decided I would be as well sleeping beside you since I was going to be spending the night anyway, I think they trust you more than they do me. You won a massive amount of brownie points by refusing to let me go with you, my parents love you even more for that.”

Harry couldn’t believe he had permission to have Hermione in his bed, he gave her a kiss before asking what he’d missed in the last two days.

“Well Colin’s pictures were spectacular and showed clearly what you all faced under the lake, I didn’t think Graham Bulstrode could respect you four any more until he saw those pictures. There’s no chance of him saying anything after you four saved his daughter, especially as Victor hasn’t left Millie’s side since you returned. The Krums and Delacours are still here, with the Bulstrodes and Diggorys popping in and out. Molly and Arthur were here, trying to thank you for saving Ron. I think they’re hoping for a reconciliation but the prat is walking about playing the hero, Fleur says he looked really heroic before fainting, tied to a gravestone and screaming for help.”

Harry couldn’t hide his disappointment, “I thought this might have made him grow up a bit.”

“Ron thinks it makes him attractive to the girls, the only one who will go anywhere near him is Romilda Vane, a little second year who loves to hang about with older boys.”

“What happened with the tournament?”

“Well Karkaroff has done a runner, they think he set Ron up as a portkey to capture you. Looks like Dumbledore did you a favour by separating the hostages, didn’t save him from jail though. Arthur was in no fit state to hand out marks and Barchoke was with you, fighting Voldemort.” Hermione paused to gather her thoughts, “The general feeling seems to be the whole tournament has been a farce since the beginning. The picture of you four fighting the mermen to rescue Millie has swung public opinion to the champions and away from the organisers. Luna’s story highlighted that the mermen were following orders from Dumbledore to be aggressive. That two of them died in the cemetery and you lot had to rescue Ron has totally destroyed Dumbledore’s reputation.”

“So you think they’ll cancel it?”

“You couldn’t be that lucky, I don’t want Fleur or Victor to leave though. You need to get some rest Harry, Pomfrey recommended rest for recovery.”

“Hermione I’ve been out of it for two days, the last thing I need is more rest.”

“Oh you have no idea how much I hoped that would be your answer.” There weren’t too many more words exchanged after that.

Thanks for reading.

Apologies to fans of FG2, it’s currently getting squeezed between ‘Can’t’ and ‘World’ but I will be returning to it shortly.

Chapter 16

Breakfast next morning was a noisy but happy affair as Harry was brought up to date with everything that had been happening during his stay in bed, Remus, and Sirius both had classes to teach so they made arrangements to meet tonight after dinner. Invitations were sent out to the Diggorys, Bulstrodes and Barchoke, they would retire to the library after Dobby and Winky spoiled them again with a sumptuous meal.

The number in the library was increased to twelve with the inclusion of Hermione, Harry's comment of, "She will bear the Potter heirs so she needs to be here," pleased the young witch on so many levels.

Barchoke brought the assembled company up to speed on what steps they had taken to secure the article. "It currently sits in our highest security vault, I have a few suggestions on how to increase that security but would like to hear what everyone else has to say first."

Sirius thought the answer was simple, "Why don't we just destroy it? Muggle explosives, drop it into a volcano, something it couldn't survive."

Sal hissed and Harry translated, "If we destroy the sword or stone, it will release Voldemort. The magic involved in creating his prison should render it pretty indestructible but I wouldn't like to chance it. The only way to kill him would have been to complete the ritual as the rat intended, let Voldemort get a body and then kill him. That task is a lot easier to say than do!"

Harry could see from the looks he was receiving that option didn't appeal to anyone sitting here either. "We've effectively trapped him like a genie in a bottle, we now have to keep that bottle safe and unopened."

Amos shook his head, "Any ideas I had focused on destroying the bloody thing, knowing that will have the opposite effect of what we want leaves me with nothing to bring to the table."

Claude had obviously been giving the problem a lot of thought as well, "I like the idea of having it locked away, rather than dropping it in the deepest part of the ocean. If the pressure cracked the stone he would escape. What we need here is layers of security to enhance the protection even Gringotts can offer."

Barchoke was impressed with the Frenchman's reasoning, it exactly matched his own. "The strongest protection we at Gringotts offer are blood wards. As with the sword, only a customer whose blood matches exactly would be able to open the vault."

They all liked the idea but who to choose, everyone there had children at present or hoped for them in their future. This was a burden they didn't want hanging around their family's neck. Barchoke continued, "If I may, I would like to offer myself as the keeper of the door. My wife died young before having any offspring and we goblins mate for life. I am the last of my line and when I pass, the door would be sealed forever."

Marko could see the logic behind this, "So the article is practically indestructible, the vault can only be opened by Barchoke and the sword needs a Potter to remove it. Add to that it's probably in the most secure part of Gringotts and nobody outside this room even knows it exists and I think we may have the layers that Claude was looking for."

It was a measure of how far this group had come that the thought of this dangerous artefact being effectively in goblin control didn't worry them in the slightest. They had fought alongside Barchoke and trusted the goblin implicitly, this indeed looked their best option.

"I would like a few of you to be present when I seal the vault."

Harry interrupted Barchoke, "I don't want to be anywhere near that vault, in fact I think we should erect wards that specifically prevent Potters from getting anywhere near that vault."

Barchoke agreed, "That can be done easily Harry, now about that other business..."

“My mind is made up Barchoke. I publicly gave my word and I am delighted, as well as honour bound to keep it. This is the way it has to be.”

Barchoke appeared resigned and handed Gringotts envelopes to the entire company, apart from Harry and Hermione.

Sirius was not amused when he opened it, “Harry, what the hell is this?” There was undisguised anger in his voice.

“It’s simple really, I offered a hundred thousand galleon reward for the capture of Peter Pettigrew. You lot captured him therefore I am honour bound to pay it. Please don’t be insulted, I did the same for Hermione with her share of the Basilisk gold. Give it to charity if you must Sirius but that gold was placed in a separate vault specifically for this purpose, the goblins have to pay it out. Barchoke’s objection was that he didn’t want a share, he was there and fought well so of course he deserves a share.”

The Bulstrodes and Krums were not wealthy people, with a combined twenty thousand between them and living in Bulgaria, Marko and Victor could make a lot of changes to their lives. Graham kept staring at the paper in front of him, ten thousand was enough to take the financial worry out of life for his family and enable him to spoil the two Bulstrode ladies.

Remus was also about to object when Harry headed him off, “I would have been happy to see that money go to some stranger for capturing the rat, I’m delighted to present it to my friends instead. I just hope Amos here doesn’t think I’m trying to bribe him.” This got them seeing the funny side of this and ended their objections.

Amos was laughing, everyone in Magical Britain knew of the reward for Pettigrew, just as they knew who had captured him. He didn’t think there would be a problem over this, “Oh Harry I will of course declare it and probably give some of it to charity, I think Tabitha deserves a good holiday this year though.”

“I’m working on that sir so please don’t go making arrangements just yet,” this drew looks from around the room. “What? I want to spend at least some of the summer with my friends and you will all be invited. We just haven’t worked out any details yet.”

The minister for magic could only shake his head, “You Mr Potter are something else, I don’t suppose you have any ideas to rescue the disaster this bloody tournament has become? The other two schools are going home and their champions are desperate for an excuse to stay.”

“As a matter of fact sir I have.”

Sirius hid his face in his hands, “Last time he did this I ended up head of Slytherin, Merlin only knows what he’ll come up with this time!”

When they heard the idea it was quickly expanded upon until everyone was excited, now all they had to do was sell it to McGonagall. Most of them in the library knew that was going to be incredibly easy.

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Minerva McGonagall addressed the packed great hall, “Now that you have enjoyed your dinner, I will answer the question of why Miss Delacour and Mr Krum are still at Hogwarts after their schools left. Due to bad planning and even worse security the tri-wizard tournament became a disaster, whoever thought staring at the Black Lake for an hour was exciting needs to be fired!”

“He already has been,” was shouted out from Sirius.

“Now the castle’s owner has been working closely with the goblins and the major Quidditch suppliers to support a new initiative that was to begin next year. I’d like to introduce you to representatives from Nimbus, Golden Arrow, Firebolt and the French company Vitesse.”

The applause was thunderous, these people were regarded by the students as representing some of the most important companies in their world.

“Our champions of course need no introduction and I’ll now hand you over to the minister of magic to give out the details.”

Amos knew he couldn’t lose, he had a captive audience and he would be telling them things they wanted to hear, it didn’t get any better than that for a politician. “Quidditch is a wonderful sport that focuses young people’s minds and generates countless emotions. Come to think of it, that’s not restricted to young people. I get such a thrill watching Hufflepuff play and knowing they have the best seeker in the school.”

This generated some laughter but Cedric’s answer of, “Gee dad thanks, I think you’re the best minister currently in the school as well,” had everyone laughing.

“What we want to do is to encourage more young people to play, so starting in September there will be a Hogwarts Junior league for students of third year and below.” This definitely had them cheering until Amos had to hold up his hands for quiet, “The people that you see beside me have all agreed to sponsor one of the houses, supplying all the equipment needed for playing Quidditch.”

Amos just let them go this time, they were standing on the seats cheering.

“Now to get things started we are holding a competition weekend where each of the champions will be allocated a house to select and coach their junior team. You are all well aware of our three seekers potential but I would like to point out that Miss Delacour’s knowledge of the game and skill on a broom are a match for any of them. It is only her Veela heritage that prohibits her playing the game competitively.”

This was a surprise to the hall, quite a few had Fleur classed as a ‘dumb blond’ though it was obvious her fellow champions didn’t think so.

Amos then produced three bowls and explained the procedure, "The first bowl contains the name of the champion, the second is the house they will coach while the third has the company who will sponsor them. Rather than having fancy flames spitting out names of students who didn't enter, I thought we would just keep it simple. Miss Delacour if you please."

Gabi was sitting with Hermione and Luna before coming forward and drawing out the first name. "Harry Potter."

"Nice to be out first for a change!" he joked.

The next bowl provided 'Slytherin', everyone held their breath for a moment until the Slytherin table started cheering. Tracy, Daphne and Millie were dancing and waving at the twins while chanting "We got Potter!" Much to the delight of the older students who remembered Harry's sorting.

When the third bowl was 'Firebolt', brand-new brooms, uniforms and equipment appeared on the Slytherin table and the house erupted. Harry and the company representative went over and sat with the delighted students.

The other three tables were eagerly awaiting their house being drawn, after having seen what was on offer.

Gabi was smiling as she drew her sister's name, that smile broadened when she was allocated Gryffindor house as they probably knew more students in that house than the other two that were left. When she drew 'Vitesse' her smile lit the room.

Romilda wasn't a happy second year, she wasn't sure if her potential boyfriend was drooling over the beautiful French Veela or the beautiful French racing brooms. Her problem being he wasn't drooling over the precocious thirteen-year-old. She stood up to attract the minister's attention before the draw proceeded any further.

“Excuse me minister, but are we supposed to help this French woman beat our Harry, that doesn’t seem fair?”

Hermione just acquired an intense dislike of the girl, “Fleur Delacour happens to be one of me and MY Harry’s best friends, we expect Gryffindor house to embrace this fabulous opportunity that it’s being presented with.”

“But Hermione, we’ve been trying to embrace her since Fleur got here.”

George of course agreed with his twin, “Yes but she keeps laughing at us and turning us down.”

“Wait George, you’re getting us mixed up with Ron, she just turns us down.”

The twins had moved, creating a space for Fleur and the representative from Vitesse to sit, the fact that the rep was young, female and gorgeous had nothing to do with it.

“Miss, this whole thing was Mr Potter’s idea and that’s exactly what he expects Gryffindor to do. The representative from Nimbus has just reminded me that I didn’t mention it’s not just the junior teams they are supporting, the senior teams will all receive brand-new equipment as well.”

The resulting cheering meant Romilda was instantly forgotten about, even by her potential boyfriend. The plan to get herself noticed had backfired on the young girl.

When Victor was assigned to Hufflepuff with Nimbus sponsorship, Cho was ecstatic. You didn’t need to be in Ravenclaw to deduce that they were getting Cedric and Golden Arrow. This could be the chance she needed to get back with the handsome coach, he would surely need someone from Ravenclaw to help him coach the younger Claws. Miss Chang couldn’t wait to volunteer for extra practice drills.

Minerva watched as the announcements had her whole school buzzing with the excitement and enthusiasm that Albus had hoped for with his flaming goblet. It just reinforced what the headmistress already knew, it wasn't about flashy packaging but more to do with the product inside. She'd discovered the last task was supposed to be a giant maze, hundreds of people sitting watching hedges would have been wonderful entertainment. Now the four champions could give full rein to their friendly rivalry and have some fun while the younger students had a fantastic opportunity. All four had asked that the prize money be donated to the families of the mermen that were murdered by Pettigrew, which had made her proud to know these fine young champions. They alone were solely responsible for engineering something good out of the shit tournament Albus had lumbered them with.

She noticed her guest of honour couldn't seem to take his eyes off Harry, Barchoke was apparently smiling though Minerva couldn't be sure. "He really is a remarkable young man, isn't he?"

"You have no idea headmistress, and that's probably for the best."

"Barchoke, you can't just say that and not follow it up, that would be cruel!" Minerva's smile told the goblin there was no malice in her words.

"Think of the group who went to rescue the Weasley boy, some of them had never even met the lad. They went because Harry was going and they refused to let him go alone. Everyone in his home wanted to go, all his friends and especially Dan Granger but they realised they would have been a hindrance."

The goblin was deep in thought for a moment, "Leaving his betrothed behind showed a level of maturity that surprised even me, it hurt him but was the correct decision. In all honesty Harry was also too young to be there but seems to have an inner strength he can call on in times of need. He has a heart bigger than anyone I've ever met and always tries to do the right thing. His friends are incredibly loyal and even their parents have fallen under his spell. There are a group of mothers from different countries, never mind walks of life who are

forming close friendships based on their charges. Could you imagine six months ago that the mother's of Miss Bulstrode and Miss Granger could be friends?"

Minerva couldn't imagine it now, never mind six months ago.

"That young man has been the catalyst for change in our world and I am more proud than I can say to have played a small part in it. Look around you, Merlin you don't even have to look because you can feel the change. The entire castle appears charged with positive energy, you have played your part in this Headmistress but it all started with Harry Potter."

She couldn't help but smile at the memory of Harry calling Albus a shit headmaster, Barchoke was right in that it began with Harry. It was now up to everyone though to take what they had and move forward with it, she would resign before allowing Hogwarts to slip back to the way it was. The amazing thing though was that it wasn't just Hogwarts. With an honest minister, the goblin nation being trusted as friends rather than feared and a newspaper that told the truth their entire world had changed for the better. Harry Potter had played a major part in all of the above.

Amos had pulled Harry aside for a quiet word, "Dumbledore is insisting on speaking to you before his trial. Apparently he has some big secret to tell you that's going to make everything all better."

"That must be some bed time story if it's going to end happy ever after, what would you suggest sir?"

Amos was touched that Harry trusted him enough to ask his advice, "Well I would suggest you get used to calling me Amos, I don't see how it could hurt to talk to him. The old coot always played his cards far too close to his chest, he may have information that can help us."

"Ok I'll come to the ministry tomorrow, who knows, the old man might even tell the truth for once."

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Harry and Hermione walked into the interview room where Dumbledore was waiting on them, "I'm sorry Harry but I must insist on speaking to you alone."

"Ok," he said before turning to Hermione and leading her back out the door, "Let's go and get some ice cream so our trip won't have been a total waste of time."

Dumbledore was nonplussed, "Harry?"

"Let me make it as plain as I can old man, your days of insisting anything with me are over, I got a message you had something to tell me. I'm here so talk or we're gone."

"Fine but first you must tell me what happened with Voldemort, I understand you stabbed him with the sword of Gryffindor. Did he have a body? Where did he get it from?"

"That information is on a 'need to know' basis, you don't need to know. Start talking or we're out of here."

"Very well Harry, I think you will change your mind about a lot of things when you hear this. Everything I have done has been for your benefit and I know Miss Granger here is a very smart girl. She'll soon realise you'll have to break off this betrothal and train with me to face your destiny."

Albus mistakenly took their shocked silence as acceptance and continued his tale, "Before you were born a prophecy was made concerning you and the dark lord, originally it could have indicated another but that scar on your head marks Harry Potter as the chosen one in more ways than you know."

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches...Born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh month dies...and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have power the Dark Lord knows not...and either must die at the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives....

The silence that followed was shattered to smithereens as Hermione's temper exploded all over Dumbledore, "You stupid old bastard, you ruined my Harry's life over a piece of mumbo-jumbo that could have thousands of interpretations..."

Albus stood his ground, "It is quite specific, 'Either must die at the hand of the other...'"

A raging Hermione cut him off, "For neither can live while the other survives. What the fuck do you think Harry's been doing for the last fourteen years? Granted you did your best to ensure he didn't have much of a life but he is most definitely alive."

Harry was in awe of Hermione, he'd never seen her like this before. Squaring-up to the most powerful wizard in the country and ready to rip his whiskers out by the roots. It was the swearing though that really alerted him to just how angry his betrothed was, that comment about breaking off their relationship must have triggered something deep within her.

For Hermione it was like drawing back the curtains to reveal a bad play, more like a Greek tragedy with Harry being cast in the leading role by producer / director Dumbledore. She could see it all playing out in her mind like a series of acts and could only come to one conclusion. "You've planned out his whole life haven't you? What's the final scene in this production of yours? Harry dies a tragic death, ridding the world of Voldemort, while his mentor and only confidant Albus Dumbledore weeps over the body, proclaiming loudly that it should have been him lying there?"

Albus had admitted Hermione was very smart but her insight and brilliance here caught him off guard, both teens could see it written all over his face that Hermione had come a lot closer to the truth than Albus thought was possible.

Harry wrapped his arms around Hermione, while glaring at Dumbledore. "Listen carefully old man, there is more chance of Vernon Dudley running the London Marathon this year than there is of Hermione and I splitting up, not going to happen! Voldemort is after

me, hardly a shocking revelation. As Hermione here so eloquently pointed out, I am living so either Voldemort's dead or your prophecy is a load of shit. If he comes back, my friends and me will deal with him. You would have me cut myself off from everything that makes life worth living and be solely under your control, it leaves me wondering why?"

"Harry I am far older and wiser than you, there has to be an element of trust here..."

Hermione was struggling in his arms to get at Dumbledore, her worship of authority figures long gone. "Over my dead body you old bastard! Where was this wisdom when you employed Voldemort to teach us or there was a Basilisk bigger than a bus roaming freely around Hogwarts? I will gladly place my life in Harry's hands; I wouldn't trust you to make me a cup of tea. There's no telling what you would put in it!"

"This ends here old man, as Hermione said we don't trust you, why the hell should we? The next and last time we see you will be at your trial, we are putting forward every charge we can. You had no right to interfere with my life as you are neither parent nor guardian, just a meddling old man who couldn't keep his crooked nose out of things that didn't concern him. It's such a pity that's the way history will remember you, does anyone remember what a brilliant Hogwarts student Tom Riddle was?"

Harry led a still raging Hermione out the door, he had no idea what this power he was supposed to have could be, but reckoned he might need it to save his skin if her temper was ever directed at him.

Albus just sat there, if Hermione had set about him with a beater's bat she couldn't have done anymore damage. He'd played his last card and not only been trumped, he'd been kicked from the table. Albus had been a player for well over a century, to have his arse handed to him by two kids really hurt. Not a word was spoken as he was led back to his cell, there was nothing left to say.

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There was nothing left to say at Privet Drive either, the removal men had just taken the last of their belongings onto the truck. Dudley receiving a pig's heart through the letter box for Valentines Day was the final straw, the accompanying card proclaimed it was to match his tail.

This meant that either their neighbours knew about Dudley's affliction from that giant buffoon or the freaks were taunting them. The only choice left open to the Dursleys was to move house.

They were going to have to live in a furnished flat while waiting on their house selling, before discovering how much money they had to buy a new home. Normally houses on this estate sold very quickly, but their recent run of bad luck had seen number four buck that trend. The black grass and shrubs didn't bloody help either, they had new turf laid to replace the back lawn only to have it turn black by the next morning.

Their only crumb of comfort was that they had no intention of leaving a forwarding address. Thoughts of the freak boy turning up at number four, with his trunk and bird to find someone else living there was the only thing that could bring a hint of a smile to their faces.

That Harry was incredibly wealthy and could quite easily have bought the entire estate without putting a dent in his vault escaped their grasp of the situation. They also had no way of knowing that the young wizard had decided immediately after being recognised as an adult that he would never set foot in Privet Drive again.

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Dumbledore's trial was like a three ringed circus but with Amelia as the ringmaster it ran very smoothly. To prove the prosecutions case for reckless endangerment of children entrusted to his care, she started with bringing a magical artefact that he admitted the dark lord was desperate to get his hands on into a castle full of children. To then place deadly traps with only a verbal warning between the students and a Cerberus was at least negligent. Compounding the

matter by employing the dark lord to teach defence was utter madness.

Amelia moved on to the following year. With the knowledge the chamber of secrets had been opened before and a student had died as a result, the headmaster had done nothing. Thanks to the Quibbler everyone had now seen pictures of what petrified four students and saw another having to be rescued from the chamber by Harry Potter. Amelia left the chamber in no doubt that the school should have been closed after the first child was petrified. Leaving the students in what was clearly an extremely dangerous environment and could easily have resulted in many deaths was reckless endangerment.

Albus sat and listened as Amelia built a rock solid case against him, with Harry pressing charges over his attempted interference in the Potter betrothal, Azkaban was always going to be the result here. It wasn't until Albus had the time to sit and reflect on what he'd become that he had his epiphany, it was said confession was good for the soul, he would soon find out.

Amelia was stopped in mid-flow as Albus suddenly stood up, "I think we've heard enough Amelia, you have made your case very eloquently. I will admit to possessing information that could negate this through extenuating circumstances but I won't bore you with it today. Instead I will ask you to forgive an old man whose pride and arrogance led him to assuming he alone knew better than everyone else. It took two extraordinary teenagers to highlight the error of my ways." He spotted Harry and Hermione in the chamber, "Thank you both for so articulately highlighting the error of my ways, and so giving me the opportunity to change them."

Albus turned his attention back to an opened mouthed Amelia, "It is my intention to leave these shores forever and spend the remainder of my life working to redeem the name of Dumbledore."

Amelia shook herself back to reality, "Excuse me Albus, did you just plead guilt too all the charges? I really don't remember the suggestion you mentioned being offered as a solution!"

“Ah Amelia, I just couldn’t see myself sitting in Azkaban when there is so much good I can do in the world. You have my word you will never see me again.” Albus held his hand above his head as if he was making an oath as a flash of flame had him out of there before anyone had time to react.

With all the security surrounding the trial it was an embarrassment to the ministry that Albus had escaped so easily, they just had to tell the truth, there simply was no security against a phoenix!

Albus Dumbledore’s dramatic exit in a blaze of glory had ensured his name would be remembered in history, and indeed the myth would eventually become greater than the man. Lodged at the back of everyone’s mind was the thought, if he could flash out of there, who knew where he could turn up next?

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It was this thought, amongst others, that had Hermione sneaking into her betrothed’s bedroom.

Harry was just beginning to slip off to sleep when he felt her body spoon into his, “Hermione, have you any idea the trouble we could get into for this?”

“I couldn’t sleep Harry for thinking of Dumbledore.”

“Not exactly what I wanted to hear Hermione, kind of kills the mood you being in my bed was generating.”

A slap to the back of the head was accompanied by a noise demonstrating her disgust at his comments, “You may have just killed any chance of even getting kissed tonight. I’m worried that he’s still out there and may try to interfere with our lives again.”

Harry rolled over and pulled her into his arms, “Godric says the only way Fawkes would have save his ancient arse was if he truly repented what he’s done and was determined to make amends. The

best way for him to do that is to stay out of our lives forever. Both he and Sal figure the old goat's headed somewhere they've never heard the name Dumbledore. Can you imagine the impact he would make flashing into a magical village deep in some jungle with Fawkes on his shoulder?"

Hermione could see Harry's point, "He would be Emperor Albus before the week was out. Does this mean we're not changing any of our plans?"

"If our plans include the Quidditch tournament, a long, lazy holiday with our friends, a visit to Charlie's dragon reserve and the small matter of becoming engaged then there is no change there."

This earned Harry a kiss that curled his toes, Hermione had to ask her question twice before he could answer, "Do you think you'll win the competition?"

"It's not about the winning, its showing them what the game of Quidditch is all about and allowing them to appreciate and love the sport."

Hermione just continued to stare into his eyes, "Ok, so we're going to beat the stuffing out of them. Millie and Victor have some sort of side-bet going on, the details of which I don't want to know, but she says it's imperative that we win."

This set Hermione off with about of the giggles, "Did you know Cedric has made Luna his assistant coach?"

"I didn't know Luna was that into Quidditch?"

"Oh she's not, it was the only way Cedric could get any peace from Cho following him around like a lost puppy. Luna's his bodyguard, Fleur laughed her head off before having to get Colin to do the same job for her in Gryffindor. Do you need a bodyguard Mr Potter?"

Hermione was loosening the buttons on his pyjama top as she spoke, "Only from you love!" He tried to change the subject before they got

carried away, “I was thinking we could all get together at the villa in Cyprus for the start of the holidays, Victor begins training in August so that would give us July together.”

“What about the Weasleys? I will not put up with Ron for a month and, to be perfectly honest, my mum can only stand Molly for a short period before wanting to strangle the woman for the way she treats you. When I told her that by my reckoning you’d spent a total of five weeks your entire life at the Burrow she was shocked. I’ve only been there the once for the world cup and Molly acts as if she’s known me all my life, it’s the trying to run our lives that mum really objects to.”

“I wouldn’t want the twins and Ginny to miss out though I agree about Molly, what if we asked them for part of the month? I don’t see anyway she would let them out of her sight for longer than that.”

“She might have to focus those beady eyes on Ronald, Ginny caught him leaving a broom closet with Miss Vane. That girl is an accident waiting to happen, she’s not nearly as grown up as she pretends to be and I just can’t see Ron being the responsible one in any relationship.”

“Now she’s talking about another boy, real mood killer!”

She kissed away any objections, “What I really wanted to talk to you about was becoming engaged sooner. I know you want to place another ring on my finger first but watching you leave to face Voldemort frightened the life out of me. Watching Dumbledore escape today brought it all back at full force, I don’t want to wait any longer Harry.”

Hermione was playing with his hair while staring into his eyes, praying that he wasn’t disappointed with her, “You have been the perfect gentleman Harry and I so want that other ring on my finger, I guess you really can’t have it both ways.”

Harry kissed her gently on the lips, “What if I told you that your ring was in the drawer of my bedside cabinet and I would love to slip it on your finger right now?”

“Then Mr Potter, my answer would be yes, to anything you asked me.”

Harry’s hand immediately shot out to open the drawer.

The End

A/N I think this is as good a place as any to leave this story, as always thanks for reading

CHP17